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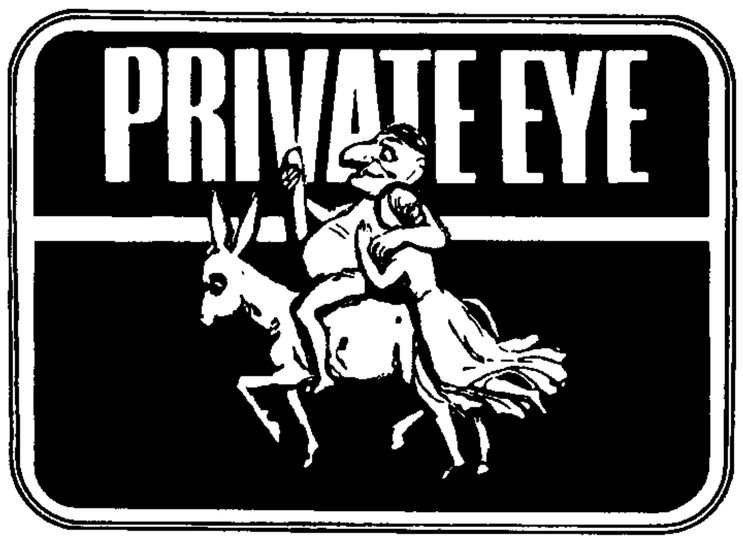

Oscar-winning Lord of the Gnomes

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AFTER GCHQ translator Katharine Gun blew the whistle on secret service dirty tricks and the UN, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw was asked a series of tricky written parliamentary questions by Neil Gerrard MP, chair of the Justice Unions Parliamentary Group.

Had staff at the listening post complied with the US National Security Agency's request to eavesdrop on the UN war waiverers? Had staff had been assured that such action was legal? What assurances had GCHQ staff been given that the government actions in preparation for war with Iraq were legal?

Gerrards's questions to Straw all went unanswered. The matter was *sub judice* pending Ms Gun's trial, it was explained, and might impinge upon her case. Now that the Attorney General has dropped the Official Secrets Act charges against Ms Gun, what excuse will the Foreign Secretary come up with next?

THE anti-war Labour backbenchers have got a good question: "If the secretary-general of the United Nations was bugged, who else has been targeted and how far did this operation go?" ie, were they being bugged too?

This week a number of them, including Hayes and Harlington MP John McDonnell, submitted an emergency early-day motion. It demanded a statement from the prime minister on whether he had ordered the bugging of telephones belonging to "members of organisations opposed to the war – and members of parliament".

PS: The former president of the United Nations general assembly, Jan Kavan, maintained to friends throughout the Iraq imbroglio that his office was bugged and that American pressure was being brought to bear on the Czech government to prevent him from returning to any senior paid role in public life when his tenure at the UN came to an end. Kavan's scepticism towards US policy towards Iraq even cost his daughter a temporary work permit in the US – she had been offered a three month placement at the UN!

IF there were one office the Dear Leader would surely love to bug, it would be that of chancellor Gordon Brown. Currently Brown appears to have a spring in his step, even taking to the Commons tea rooms and the "Stranglers" bar to sweet-talk backbench Labour MPs.

Brown, it seems, may again have fallen for Tony's blandishments and is labouring under the impression that the Dear Leader will pass the torch to him shortly after winning a historic third term. The chancellor's sunny mood may however soon give way to a bout of spectacular brooding once he discovers that one of the prime minister's new best friends, *Express* proprietor Richard Desmond, has been round to Number 10 again to slag off the chancellor's tax policies.

JOINED-UP GOVERNMENT

23 January: National audit office (NAO) report reveals that 20 defence procurement projects are more than nine months overdue and £3.1bn over budget.

25 February: Tony Blair tells civil service to be more like the armed forces in "remorseless focus on delivery".

TONY BLAIR's sudden rediscovery of his homeless past – "he was forced to sleep rough on a park bench when he first came to London", according to his wife – came as something of a surprise to those who have discussed the topic with him in the past.

Blair failed to mention his experience on the streets during three different interviews with the *Big Issue* – even when, in 1997, he dismissed the very area in which it was claimed he had slept, around King's Cross and Euston, as "quite a frightening place" which he did not like his children visiting.

O.B.N.

"Think dark, think brooding, think masterful and in control. Watching Gordon Brown delivering his annual budget is one of the highlights of my TV year. All those clever sums – whatever he produced from his box, there is always the tantalising possibility that this man might have a clever formula between the sheets."

— Sharon Hendry, in a piece on "TV's sexiest scenes", the *Sun*, 27 February.

POORLY paid *Daily Mail* hacks cursed as they read the *Eye*'s revelations about the huge salaries awarded to editor Paul Dacre's favourites. Dacre did plenty of cursing too, denouncing *Eye* hacks as "fuckers".

So it's nice to see that the man holding the purse-strings – managing editor Lawrie "Insin" Sear – has retained a sense of proportion. After discovering that a messenger boy at the *Mail*'s Kensington HQ had photocopied the *Eye* piece and distributed it around the newsroom, Sear confronted the chief messenger and demanded to know which of his underlings had committed this treasonous act.

When the man refused to grass on his staff, Sear began his own frantic search for the culprit. Security camera footage was requisitioned and pored over. Eventually the messenger responsible for the photocopying (who earns ten times less than Dacre's pets) was identified. His fate now hangs in the balance.

SHORT – NOW IT GETS PERSONAL

Street Of Shame

OTHER newspapers seldom follow up the *Sunday Times*'s "exclusives", knowing full well that most of them are bollocks. But the MMR story on 22 February seemed to be an exception – picked up by every other paper in the land, and of course by Tony Blair and his ministers.

So *Sunday Times* reader might have expected acres more coverage in last weekend's edition, as well as a fair bit of self-congratulation. In the event, there was scarcely a murmur – one very brief article by Brian Deer, plus a story claiming that Leo Blair had the MMR jab against his mother's wishes. Understandably enough, embarrassed *ST* editor John Witherow decided not to return to Deer's sensational "revelation" of the previous week, since it had indeed turned out to be, er, bollocks (see In the Back, p27). Wakefield's alleged conflict of interest – which had apparently taken a "four-month investigation" by Deer to uncover – had in fact been declared by Wakefield himself in a letter to the *Lancet* six long years ago!

Deer accuses *The Lancet* of "spoiling" his scoop by issuing a statement to other papers before the *Sunday Times* was printed. Even though the scoop in question was six years old and not a scoop anyway, he is suing for £1,000 in lost earnings – in Lambeth county court, as it would be "a huge waste of money to have the case heard in the high court".

He should know. Older *Eye* readers may recall the epic battle 15 years ago between Deer and investigative hack Duncan Campbell, who had written an *exposé* in the *New Statesman* of one Cass Mann, a purveyor of vitamin pills who was trying to persuade Aids patients to stop taking AZT and buy instead what Campbell denounced as "worthless quack remedies".

Unbeknown to Campbell, Cass Mann was a friend of Deer. Soon afterwards several prominent gays received hysterical letters from the *Sunday Times* hack attacking Campbell as a "mentally unstable… self-hating homosexual". Campbell complained to then editor Andrew "Brillo Pad" Neill that this libel appeared to have his newspaper's imprimatur since it appeared on *ST* writing paper, and after legal threats Deer was obliged to send Campbell a grovelling letter of apology. It concluded: "That your general thesis about Cass Mann proved to be right and mine proved to be wrong is, for me, a cause for reflection."

Will the latest *débâcle* give Deer further cause for reflection? Highly improbable. A petulant temper tantrum seems moré likely.

"WHENEVER a newspaper reports on the latest developments in the MMR controversy," we noted two years ago (*Eye* 1049), "concerned mother and GP Dr Penelope Elphinstone seems to enter the debate via the letters page."

Lo and behold, the latest MMR news prompted yet another fusillade from Dr Elphinstone, who in the past fortnight has had letters in the *Sunday Times*, *Sunday Telegraph*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph*.

"The legally aided MMR vaccine litigation has cost £15 million and endangers children by promoting the unsubstantiated health scare that MMR causes autism," she wrote to the *Daily Telegraph* last week. "These funds would be better spent on children than lawyers."

There have been countless such letters since 1999 – in the *Observer*, *Express*, *Times*, *Guardian*, *Independent* et al – and the wording seldom changes. After railing against "the unsubstantiated health scare" she grumbles that the MMR lawsuits "endanger children, enrich lawyers and impoverish the health service".

One other thing doesn't change much. In her letters last week, as on all previous occasions, she forgot to mention that the man with whom she lives in Islington is Dr Anthony Barton, a solicitor and medical practitioner who just happens to advise Aventis Pasteur – one of the defending pharmaceutical giants in the MMR legal action.

"JOHNNY'S rotten language has no place on TV" thundered the *Express*'s front page the day after the old punk's four-letter outburst on *I'm A Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here.*

"When the profanities came spilling out, the liberal use of the c-word was cruder and more offensive than I, and I suspect many other viewers, could stomach," reported Laura Kirby inside. "Those few minutes of television must mark a new low in what we consider acceptable and what we do not. It is just another sign that television… is sinking to grubby new depths. Mary Whitehouse would have been turning in her grave."

Thankfully, her boss Richard Desmond knows exactly what is and isn't acceptable – which is why he censors with asterisks the listings for his own Television X channel which appear daily in the *Express*. Highlights from the week in question included "*Glamour S***s*", "*Superd**k*", "*P***y Malone*", "*R****l Rooter*" and "*C**k Crazy*".

"My precious..."

A TREMENDOUS front-page splash adorned Richard "Dirty" Desmond's super soaraway *Sunday Express* on 22 February: "World Exclusive: SAS Corners Evil Warlord. BIN LADEN TRAPPED LIKE A RAT."

It "revealed" that British SAS troops had surrounded Bin Laden on a Pakistan hilltop and "are poised to seize him in his mountain lair".

It is scarcely news that the US (aided by some British special forces) has stepped up its search for Bin Laden, as Dubya needs to nab him in time for the presidential election. But the *Express* went further, with a detailed map showing precisely where he is alleged to be. Its tip-off came from a senior American source "close to the White House and the Pentagon, who summoned the *Sunday Express* to a secret breakfast meeting". Two days later "a US intelligence source contacted the paper to reveal the location of the lair".

The story remains a "world exclusive" – in that no other paper has seen fit to follow it up. Might this by any chance be related to the fact that it carried the byline of our old friend Gordon Thomas, the septuagenarian hack whose previous triumphs include the revelation that Terry Waite had been murdered by his captors in the Lebanon; that Princess Diana's dying wish had been to make a wildlife movie with Brad Pitt; and that Robert Maxwell was murdered by a team of Israeli frogmen?

And, as *Eye* readers may recall, in May 2002 Thomas revealed that Colonel Gaddafi had cloned a baby replica of himself, which was due to be born that November. Like so many Thomas scoops, this came from highly reliable though unidentified "intelligence sources". And, not for the first or last time, it was total bollocks.

DO *Sun* readers actually read *The Sun*? That is the question that editor Rebekah Wade must be asking after the results of January's "*Sun* reader panel" landed on her desk.

Four months after declaring that Garry Bushell was their favourite columnist (he was sacked from the paper two years previously), readers were grilled by market information company TNS on the paper's coverage of the Hutton report. Having studied political editor Trevor Kavanagh's opinion that "Hutton reached the only sane conclusion", and read the paper's own series of editorials which declared "The government won, the BBC lost: Game Over" and dismissed anyone who thought differently as a "conspiracy theorist", 63 percent of readers concluded that the inquiry was nothing more than "a whitewash".

SPEAKING to the *Sun* in another "exclusive", former England rugby captain Martin Johnson explained what he would be doing now he had retired from the international game: "I will be in Rome for the match with my wife, a few of the lads from Leicester and some of our sponsors. And the good part is the fact that I can relax and have a few drinks."

Anyone who was unsure who those sponsors might be and what those drinks might consist of was given a not so subtle hint by the photo accompanying the interview. There was Johnson holding a pint of beer, the word Tetley ostentatiously emblazoned on the glass, which itself was resting on a Tetley's beer towel.

It was left to the *Observer*'s Eddie Butler to explain why the usually laconic Johnson was sharing his thoughts with the national press. Butler's "exclusive" interview the next day began: "This all came with a condition. For a chat with the World Cup-winning captain, we should have to mention that he is an ambassador for Tetley's beer and that he was promoting World Champion Ale. There, it's done."

BI-AURA is a fast-growing branch of medical mumbo-jumbo, whose therapists "balance chakras" and "funnel energy" by waving their hands near patients' bodies. All this arm-waving apparently does wonders for one's "aura" by "drawing trapped or blocked energy out of the system".

The purveyors of this twaddle, the Bi-Aura Foundation, certainly aren't short of energy themselves. Their first publicity coup was a long and gushing feature last April in the *Daily Mail* by Lesley Gibson, a regular freelance contributor. Gibson wrote an equally uncritical piece for *Closer* magazine, advising readers to "unblock your life force with Bi-Aura Therapy, just like Drew Barrymore".

Alas, one small detail was missing. Besides being a freelance journalist, Lesley Gibson works as an "assistant trainer" and PR person for, er, the Bi-Aura Foundation.

***MIRROR* editor Piers Morgan gave his TV career a boost last week by ensuring that his paper gave no fewer than seven prominent plugs to his appearances in Channel 4's *Faking it* and BBC1's *Tabloid Tales*.**

Both programmes featured as "must-see TV" in the paper's "We Love Telly" mag, while *Faking It* was trailed in Tuesday's TV listings with a large picture of Morgan's face rather than that of the actual subject of the programme, Jatinder Sumal.

The following day former royal intruder Ryan Parry was dispatched to grill Sumal on her experiences of Piers ("it was like he was the teacher and I was the pupil… I learned a lot"), while two entire pages were devoted to that night's edition of *Tabloid Tales* in which Morgan interviewed Shane Ritchie. The fact that the publicity still which the BBC issued for the programme showed Ritchie holding up a copy of the *Sunday People* did not bother the *Mirror*'s picture editors – they simply blurred out the rival's masthead before using it.

BLACKWATCH

THERE is nothing sadder than the sight of old pals falling out... and many of Lord Gnome's readers will no doubt be deeply distressed to see that Conrad Black has had another clear-out of his friend-cupboard.

In retaliation for the lawsuit brought by Hollinger International (HI) in Delaware, which concluded last week, Black issued a counterclaim against HI directors – including Henry Kissinger and Richard "Prince of Darkness" Perle.

There was a time, not so long ago, when Black and Kissinger were like brothers, with a love passing the love of women. Conrad feted Dr K at opulent dinner parties every time he was in London. When Conrad took up his seat in the Lords in November 2001, Kissinger was there in the gallery. When Christopher Hitchens published *The Trial of Henry Kissinger*, Conrad penned a 1,000-word denunciation of the "contemptible" Hitchens which his newspapers were obliged to print. As recently as last summer, Black wrote an adulatory review of Kissinger's latest book on Vietnam for the *American Spectator*.

Perle, too, was a beloved *confrère*, one of the handful of guests invited to the wedding of Conrad and Barbara Amiel in 1992. Last May he flew all the way from France to New York to grace the AGM of Hollinger International, earning himself a handsome vote of thanks from Lord Black. And when Perle had his spot of bother with conflicts of interest – chairing the defence policy board while running companies which hoped to benefit from Pentagon contracts – Conrad's *Telegraph* papers rushed to his defence. "I'm very high on Conrad," Perle told the *Washington Post* in 1998. "He's got a good practical sense, a scholar's scope and comprehension and not inconsiderable personal charms."

Then there is Raymond Seitz, the former US ambassador. Seitz was made a director of the *Telegraph* group in 1994 shortly after his spell as envoy to the Court of St James came to an end. As a fellow anglophile and no great fan of the Clintons or of the Fenian-leaning Kennedy Smith ambassadorship in Dublin, it was only natural that Black should have taken a liking to him. As well as being a regular guest at Black's dinner table, Seitz wrote regularly for the *Telegraph* and in 1998 the *Sunday Telegraph* serialised his memoirs.

Now all is dust and ashes. When the board of Hollinger International first smelt a rat in its chairman's wheelings and dealings last summer, Seitz was called in as a director and appointed to the special committee set up to investigate. The committee soon concluded that Black had been taking money from the company and falsely claiming that the payments were authorised by independent directors. Appearing in court in Delaware, Seitz accused him of "classic self-dealing" and "reneging" on agreements, adding that matters had "moved from the peculiar to the bizarre" when a non-compete deal with an HI subsidiary was subsequently uncovered.

According to Richard Breeden, who oversees the special committee, Black's reaction to being confronted with this evidence was to attempt an impersonation of the late Robert Maxwell. "[He] began by glaring at us and then began telling us that he had every intention of bringing actions against the members of the special committee." Black informed them that "he knew where Ray Seitz's property was in the UK and that he would have it taken away".

Should they not be able to resolve their differences in court, perhaps Black and his ex-friends can kiss and make up the next time they meet at one of the powerful cabals he belongs to – such as the Trilateral Commission (of which Black, Kissinger and Seitz are members) or the Bilderberg Group (Black, Kissinger, Perle).

Or perhaps not: the Bilderbergers are now preparing to expel Black and the Trilateral Commission will surely have to follow suit, especially since its stated aim is to "foster closer cooperation among [the] core democratic industrialised areas of the world with shared leadership responsibilities in the wider international system". The Delaware judge Leo Strine ruled last week that "Black misrepresented facts to the International board, used confidential information for his own purposes without permission and made threats, as he would put it, of 'multi-faceted dimensions' towards International's independent directors." Not much evidence there of a commitment to cooperation and "shared leadership responsibilities".

■ ■ ■

LAST week's judgment in Delaware is rather embarrassing for the Barclay twins' oddly-coiffeured boxwallah Andrew "Brillo Pad" Neill. While other business pages last weekend gave extensive coverage to the Hollinger drama, Brillo's Sunday broadsheet *The Business* had no more than one brief news story at the foot of page 3.

Probably a wise decision, if Brillo wishes to keep in with his reclusive sugar daddies. For a longer article might have been forced to mention that the Delaware judge who shredded Conrad Black also has some damning verdicts on the Barclays.

When Black did his private deal with the twins he was deliberately breaking a contractual promise to the Hollinger International directors that he wouldn't go behind their backs. "In this litigation," judge Leo Strine says, "the Barclays have portrayed themselves as innocents, who have tried to do right by all." They said they had registered their interest in buying the paper with Lazard, appointed by Hollinger to oversee the sale. "But the expression of interest was unaccompanied by the kind of candour necessary for me to draw the inference of highly honourable conduct that the Barclays desire," he adds. "The Barclays knew that they were concealing from Lazard extremely important information... They were aware of Black's obligations to [Hollinger] International and his infidelity, yet remained silent while he misled the International board." Strine adds that "in public filings in the United States and Canada, the Barclays have released information that is of questionable accuracy."

It gets worse. "Despite his daily and vigorous pursuit of the *Telegraph* assets over many months," the judge notes, "David Barclay claimed to be too ill to be deposed. [Hollinger] International respected this claim, once it was medically documented, although the record in the case casts doubt on the assertion."

Thus the suddenly ailing David Barclay was spared the ordeal of having to answer questions that might reveal his own deceptions. "His son Aidan Barclay, who was involved in the negotiations to a much lesser extent, gave helpful testimony but admitted at many points that he did not know what his father had actually done or why. As a result of this record, it is difficult for me to give as much credit to the Barclays' factual arguments as they would like."

We trust "Brillo Pad" will continue to ensure that this appalling slur on his benefactors doesn't get reported in *The Business*, the *Scotsman* or any of their other fine organs.

■ ■ ■

WITH Blackadder now condemned to offload the *Telegraph* group, the City desks of his daily and Sunday titles have bravely cast off their former reticence and decided it might be time to shine the harsh light of scrutiny on their proprietor's financial misdeeds.

So it is that City editor Neil Collins, the man who nominated Black's biography of Franklin Roosevelt as one of his books of 2003 and offered only the most cursory reports of Black's local difficulties when they broke last year, has at last managed to find space for the proceedings in Delaware. But old habits apparently die hard and the newspaper still can't quite bring itself to expose the very worst of the charges against its dishonest proprietor. While other newspapers reported the concerns of Breeden that Black might, like a guilty criminal, attempt to stow away his filthy lucre beyond the reach of investigators, the *Telegraph*'s reporter had apparently left the courtroom when this was being raised.

■ ■ ■

ORDER OF THE BLACK NOSE

"Sir: I would like to echo Mark Steyn's praise for Conrad Black as owner of the *Telegraphs* and the *Spectator*. He has been a superb proprietor; all of British journalism, not just his own papers, has benefited from the stability, the growth and the intellectual curiosity that he enabled to flourish in his titles. It is hard to see any future owner matching his generous record. William Shawcross, St Mawes, Cornwall." — *Spectator*, 21 February.

THE *Daily Telegraph*, in common with most other papers, has enjoyed picking over the smutty details of the ongoing industrial tribunal involving an anonymous major in the King's Royal Hussars.

On 18 February it devoted 800 words to the case, listing "a number of extramarital relationships" which had been cited at the tribunal on the previous day. Though the paper found room to mention the pop singer Andrea Corr (whom the major denies sleeping with) and list a number of female officers with whom he had a relationship, it omitted another name which cropped up in the evidence – that of *Telegraph* motoring journalist Fanny Johnstone.

Johnstone visited the regiment for the paper in July 2001, and filed a drooling piece about "the devastatingly gorgeous soldiers and officers", and in particular a "beautiful blue-eyed, blond major" who had demonstrated the "priapic qualities of the 120mm diameter Long Rod penetrator gun".

At the tribunal, the major denied any relationship with Johnstone – something which was much to the hackette's frustration back in 2001. "At no point did any of the scrumptious soldiers and officers of the King's Royal Hussars pin me to the ground. They were all extremely gentlemanly, dammit. But a girl can dream..."

"IF I SEE one more picture of three bikini-clad girls handing over a cheque, under the pretence that it is news, I'll be furious," newly-appointed *Daily Telegraph* editor Martin Newland told the *Evening Standard* last year.

Three bikini-clad girls may be too much – but one is clearly OK, as evidenced by the *Torygraph* front page which featured a photo of Lady Julia Pilkington wearing nothing but a bikini.

In case readers might have been baffled as to what relevance this held for domestic politics or international affairs, they would have been tipped off by the accompanying headline: "Miniskirt and gold flip-flops lead to jail for 'Sex in Jacuzzi' heiress".

Gypsy Fortune Telling

"I'm not going to meet a tall, dark stranger, but you are"

IN THE TEAROOM

UNTIL last week the predominant view in the tearoom was that the phenomenon known as Clare Short was merely the militant wing of the Gordon-for-leader campaign.

She didn't exactly take her orders from the chancellor; but she could be relied upon to use her political instincts to know what was good for him and, within bounds, use her comparative freedom as an ex-cabinet minister to pursue his interests on the sly. Even if that meant... *especially* if that meant constantly needling Tony Blair by keeping the Iraq war issue simmering nicely.

Today, the predominant view in the tearoom is that Clare a dangerous nutter who poses an imminent threat to Labour MPs from marginal constituencies. Worse, George Foulkes's revelation that, when tired and emotional, she's given to declaiming blood-curdling vows to destroy the prime minister's career, paints her as that least credible of figures: the embittered ex-employee on the verge of going postal.

But Short's biggest mistake may well be to have had the temerity to mix it with Andrew Turnbull, the cabinet secretary. He not only escaped press censure during the whole Hutton episode but was, curiously, hardly ever mentioned. Unsullied by the WMD fiasco, Sir Andrew's in a strong position to exercise his constitutional muscle. So what's next?

Downing Street's official line is that the Short problem is an issue for Labour party HQ and, er, maybe for the cabinet secretary. But one of Clare's fears probably isn't a paranoid fantasy. If ever any decision is taken either to prosecute her under the official secrets act, chuck her off the privy council or expel her from the party, the "due process" will most likely be kicked off by a committee inside No 10, chaired by the PM, at which no minutes will be taken. Some things never change.

'Quintus Slide'

POOR Simon Hughes. The Liberal Democrat hopeful for London mayor was hoping to make some political capital by opposing Red Ken's plans to extend congestion charging into Kensington and Chelsea.

Unfortunately few of the visitors to his web-based poll on the subject have much sympathy for the good folks of the Royal Borough – with 74 per cent voting to "double the size" of the CC area.

So will Hughes will bring his policy into line with point-and-click democracy? Well, no – since all is not as it seems. The campaign team says they have traced back large numbers of the votes to computers in City Hall and the House of Commons. Poll hijackers should bear in mind that internet voting is not a secret ballot.

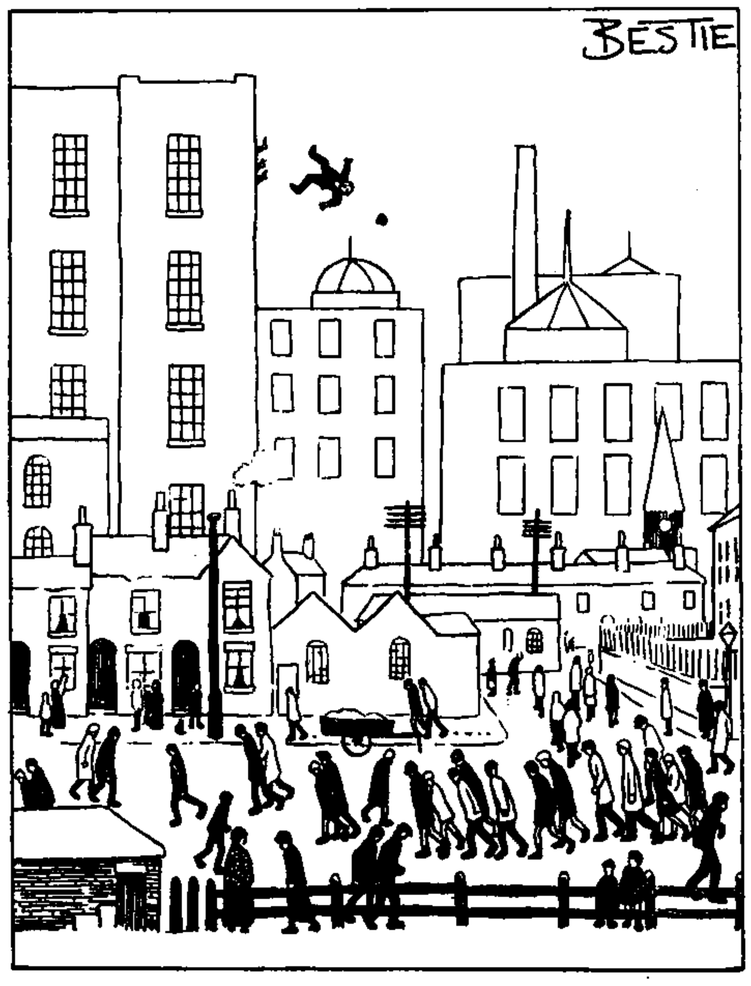
CONGESTION CHARGE CORNER

LONDON mayor Ken Livingstone's congestion charge recently celebrated its first anniversary. Some of the scheme's most vocal of critics have remained curiously silent, given their dire warnings...

"It [the Congestion Charge] is sadly misguided, technically flawed and likely to do no good at all." — Steve "Shagger" Norris, the *Grauniad*, 17 Feb 2003.

"Congestion charging may well turn Barnet into a giant car park." — Brian Coleman-balls, Conservative London Assembly member, *This is London*, 17 July 2001.

"The absolute chaos that will follow the introduction of the Congestion Charge does not bear thinking about. The shambles will be total and the gridlock complete." — Richard Ottaway MP, January 2002, Hansard.



Lowry's *The Mill Owner who Stole the Workers' Pension Fund* captures the spirit of the industrial North

INDUSTRY's wish to carry on polluting by using cheap but dirty fuel, and the government's attempt to placate environmentalists by cutting carbon dioxide emissions, have collided head-on.

The regulator who is supposed to serve both sides is Sir John Mogg, chairman of Ofgem (the office of gas and electricity markets). However, he has come out strongly on the side of what he calls the "traditional generators" who burn gas, oil and coal. This is in open defiance of his boss, industry secretary Patricia Hewitt, who is supposed to cut UK carbon dioxide emissions by 10 percent by 2010 (fat chance).

Mogg has openly criticised the energy bill now going through parliament, saying that government plans to subsidise transmission costs for wind farms in remote areas are "unnecessary and misguided". Generators of renewable energy, he says, would pay less to transmit electricity than traditional generators and "there is no evidence that further investment in renewable sources would result from a further subsidy of this sort... The government's ideas sit uncomfortably with the new European electricity directive which aims to promote competitive energy markets."

Sir John has spent most of his life as a civil servant, much of it in Brussels. He rose to be parliamentary private secretary to the trade and industry secretary in 1986 and then served in the cabinet office. He is no political innocent and knows what he is doing: he may well feel safe defying the government which appointed him because he is championing the generators who represent big business and, in the eyes of the government, must be treated with reverence.

His remarks are still a slap in the face for Hewitt, who has issued new guidelines to encourage Ofgem to "ensure that the regulation of the energy market complements and supports the work necessary to meet our environmental and social goals." The DTI has said nothing about Mogg's views; but when the energy bill emerges from parliamentary scrutiny it should be clear who is winning.

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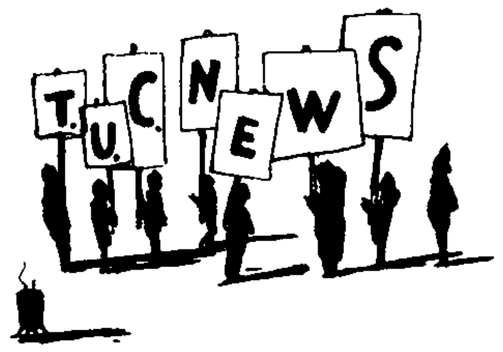
Advertisement

EUROTUNNEL called for government help to bring down its £6.4bn debt earlier this month. This is forbidden by the Anglo-French treaty which set up the project.

Margaret Thatcher wanted no state involvement – to the amazement of our French partners, who run their whole country on government tick. But the French can be relied on to find a way of evading the law. Taxpayers in both countries will have the joy of providing subsidies to pay for the free champagne for the first-class passengers. Parliament will have no grounds for complaint because it provided a 100 majority in 1987 for the project to go ahead (better than Blair got for his war) with whoops of support from the press. The *Financial Times* encouraged its readers into the (financial) abyss by proclaiming: "Eurotunnel oversubscription likely." *Eye* 669, on the other hand, quoted an expert as saying: "It will go bust and be taken over by the banks." The *Eye* reflected that the newspapers, with pages of paid-for advertising for the launch, were among the few to make a profit out of it.



THE DAYS of the GMB appear to be numbered, thanks to the fact that it is stony broke (*Eyes passim*).

In January the 700,000-strong union was forced to beg its bank manager for a £15m loan to keep it afloat. It was needed to help pay the interest on existing loans worth £10m, and to pay the redundancy costs of 150 former GMB employees.

The GMB suffers from a poverty of ideas, as well as cash. General-secretary Kevin Curran has come under fire from the union's executive committee for setting up the grandly titled "Commission 2004", whose 14 hand-picked members – not all of whom are members of the union – are tasked with answering the vital question: "If the GMB was to form a union today, what would it look like?" A no-brainer if ever there was one.

The future for the 115-year-old union looks bleak, with the most likely outcome being take-over by another union, such as the TGWU. In which case the combined outfit would almost certainly be led by the TGWU's current general-secretary, Tony Woodley, leaving Curran free to pursue his ambition of becoming a Labour MP.

Curran is thought to have his eye on Copeland in Cumbria, where Jack Cunningham, himself a former GMB official, is standing down at the next election. The constituency is home to the Sellafield nuclear plant, which has a large GMB membership. Curran seems to think this would be to his advantage.

'Blackleg'

NORTHERN IRELAND NEWS

ORGANISING a conference to debate the future government of Northern Ireland is a task requiring tact, diplomacy and a certain amount of competence. Accidentally trampling all over ancient grudges and resentment, on either side, is not best advised.

However, last month Capita's conference organising wing was forced to call off a one-day event after belatedly realising that botched brochures containing the day's programme were likely to cause serious offence. The printed title for the keynote address on the subject of "Governing Northern Ireland" had missed out a key word: Northern.

CORPORATE giant Jarvis still has some admirers in high places, despite all the unfortunate publicity about rail crashes and PFI schemes.

A new report by Northern Ireland's all-powerful Strategic Investment Board sings the praises of the Laganside court development in Belfast, a PFI project involving Jarvis and two construction firms.

Alas, since the report came out, it has been revealed that the new court building's roof has sprung no fewer than 11 leaks in the two years since it opened. Problems with courtroom layouts, meanwhile, meant that for several months some jury members could not see witnesses being cross-examined.

Nor does the report mention the pathbreaking PFI scheme for the car-park at Belfast's Royal Victoria Hospital. The Northern Ireland Audit Office recently revealed that its operating company, Car Park Services, is raking in more than £500,000 a year profit… of which only £15,000 goes back to the public purse. Within five years of the car-park opening, meanwhile, the hospital had spent more on subsidising its users than it would have cost to have built the facility itself.

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

IN AN unprecedented case at the European parliament, Lib Dem group leader Graham Watson is threatening to sue his Conservative colleague Neil Parish over comments which Parish published on his website in January.

The calumny in question? Commenting on a vote on whether British merchant ships should display the European flag or the traditional red ensign, Parish reported that "Graham Watson backed the proposal at the vote".

Watson objects that he actually voted against a proposal that used the word "must" and instead supported one that substituted the word "should", which is of course something entirely different. He is being helped in his claim by lawyer Sheila Teirney, a copyright specialist who happens to work as a legal adviser to the Lib Dems in their Cowley Street headquarters and is currently trying to secure an MP's seat in mid-Sussex.

A Valentine's day deadline for Mr Parish to apologise has now passed – five days before he received the letter informing him of it, in fact – and his own offer to "meet Mr Watson and talk about this like grown-ups" has been loftily rejected. "An MEP has accused me of something that is untrue," Watson informed the *Eye*.

HIGH PRINCIPALS

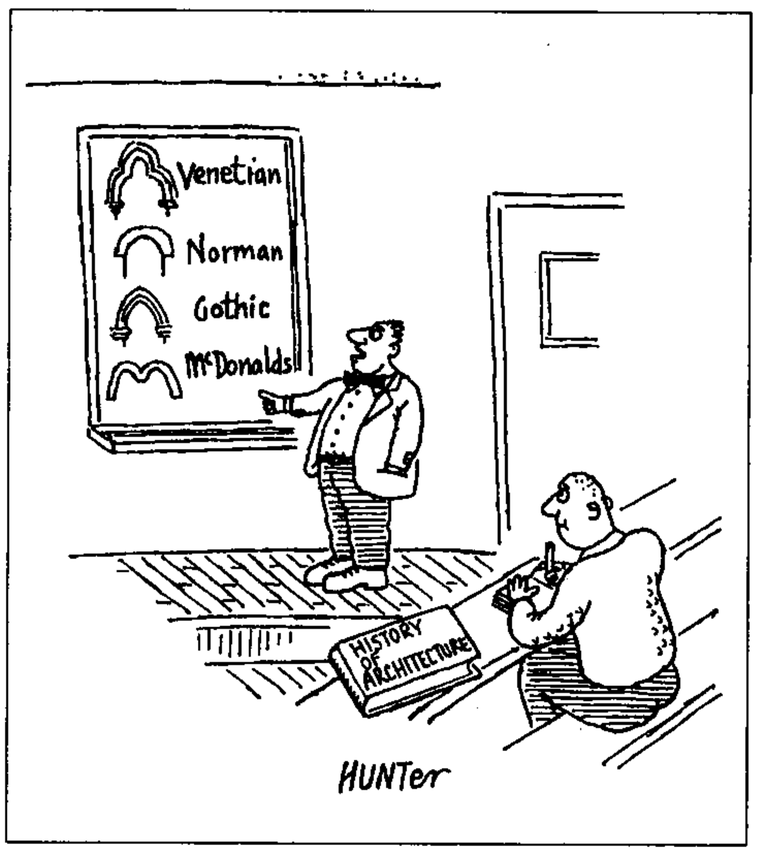
THE powers-that-be at Bournemouth University have blown nearly £1m on plans for a new teaching block and student accommodation that can never be built – because the land is already earmarked for a road-widening scheme.

So embarrassing was the gaffe that when it was discovered by reporters on the *Bournemouth Student Press*, the university threatened them with legal action should they print the story. But the student hacks went ahead and published anyway.

The Ocean Gate scheme – which would have cost £20m had it been completed – was doomed from the start because of planning restrictions which Bournemouth borough council says it warned the private developer Teesland about in 2002. Teesland kept the information to itself and by the time the university realised last year that it would have to scrap the project it had already spent £934,000 on architects, environmental surveys and legal fees.

The student hacks easily found out about the restrictions during a half-hour trip to the council's planning department. But when they prepared the story for publication they found themselves threatened with legal action by the university. They were sent an email which said "given that you are enrolled as a student… there is an obligation on you not to knowingly bring your institution into disrepute". They were also warned about the dangers of libel, but didn't let such silly threats stop them printing.

The impact on the university's finances is devastating, putting Bournemouth in deficit for the first time in its history. Vice-chancellor Gillian Slater has announced a recruitment freeze with an email to staff noting that "there are things we may have planned to do or buy that now we will be unable to do."



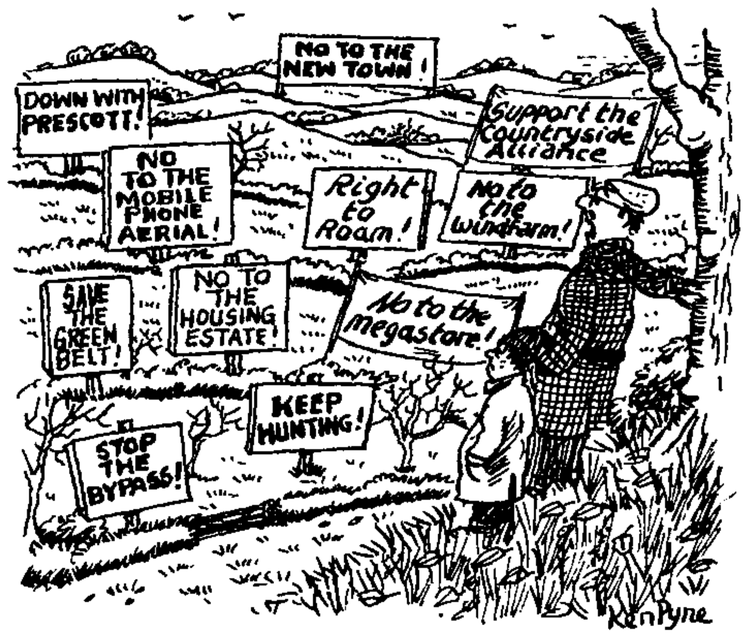
EDUCASHUN

DIDN'T do well enough on your Ofsted inspection? Want a shiny accreditation certificate to convince parents that your teaching is top notch? Try Insted instead.

A private firm of unofficial school inspectors calling themselves "Insted" is charging schools £670 for accreditation by post and email. Their website explains: "Insted is a group of British education consultants who enjoy working with schools worldwide. We understand that not every school needs us to visit so we have devised an accreditation system which is entirely paper based. Our standards are high. We also know that many innovations have meant that some schools have got a little behind and we take this into account."

In February the Council of International Schools (CIS) put out a memo about the company, noting that it is a "private consultancy operated by two people residing in Portugal". A letter to all CIS member schools from Gerry Percy, director of accreditation services, says: "I leave you to judge the worth of the so-called accreditation certificate."

Even more cheekily, the firm started out calling itself Ofsted Ltd, claiming that the name stood for "Organisation for Standards in Education". That name was dropped after the threat of legal action from the real Ofsted (the *Office* for Standards in Education) earlier this year. However a section of the website labelled "publications" the company still lists 16 books on school inspection – all published by the real Ofsted.



"Aye, lad, I can remember a time when all you could see from here were unspoilt countryside"

DOWN ON THE FARM

IT might seem unlikely for this column to feature that escapee from his own strip cartoon, Tory MP Boris Johnson, and even less that he should be seen posing as an expert on pig swill. But it was thanks to Beano Boris that our hapless farming minister 'Baby Ben' Bradshaw was recently provoked into telling yet another lie to Parliament, when Beano raised Defra's scandalous conduct in casually wiping out a whole industry: the 62 small companies which used to make a living gathering up hundreds of thousands of tons of food waste every year to feed to pigs.

At the height of the 2001 foot and mouth hysteria the then farms minister, Nick Brown, was eager to pin the blame for starting the crisis on one Northumberland pig farmer, Bobbie Waugh. It was claimed that he had been feeding his pigs with illegally imported meat from Chinese restaurants in Newcastle. When the Chinese restaurateurs protested, Brown beat a hasty retreat. But the Maffia still visited its wrath on the providers of pig swill. The feeding of swill to pigs was declared illegal, and all 62 firms were closed down overnight without compensation.

Boris Johnson is among those who rightly think that Defra has behaved outrageously to the swill producers, who had both provided an extremely useful service and, before the FMD crisis, on ministry instructions, spent a fortune investing in new equipment to make their safe product even safer. Since their industry was declared illegal, 1.7 million tons of perfectly good animal food has been chucked into landfill or washed down the sewers. Johnson accordingly asked Bradshaw whether, in all logic, Defra should not now do its duty by paying compensation to all the pig swill producers whom it has driven into bankruptcy.

Bradshaw's reply was that this would be "grossly irresponsible" since it was the ancient practice of feeding swill to pigs which had been "the cause of the £8bn foot and mouth epidemic". He has, of course, not a shred of proof to support this charge. But even if he did, as one of his Labour colleagues said, it is a bit rich to condemn an entire industry for the misdoings of one pig farmer. In answer to this Bradshaw claimed that feeding swill to pigs had been banned "across the whole of the European Union".

The infuriated former swill producers pointed out that this is just not true. In Germany alone, they explained, swill is still being fed to six million pigs, as it is in Austria, Italy and most other EU countries. They called on Bradshaw to retract his misleading claim, which at the time of going to press he has failed to do. Defra's callous treatment of the swill producers is now being investigated by the parliamentary ombudsman; and one former producer, Jason Podmore, is planning to sue the department for compensation. Initially Defra's lawyers claimed that he was not entitled to launch an action since he was bankrupt. But when it was pointed out that he was only bankrupt because Defra had forced him out of business, Mr Podmore was given leave for his action to proceed.

'Muckspreader'

EYE TV

Hustle (BBC1)

"THE CON", as anyone near a TV screen in the last month can hardly have failed to notice, "is on". Like many a pithy marketing slogan it rhymes, it's snappy, and the BBC's promotional grifters clearly believe that if it is repeated often enough between programmes we will all start watching *Hustle*. No show in history can have been launched with such a concerted cross-media marketing splurge – weeks of trails, posters, carpet-bombing of the press and, for the TV hacks, incessant PR.

The last time there was this much hullabaloo over a BBC drama was with *Spooks*. It too, had a cutesy little hook ("MI5, not 9 to 5"), was preceded by a blanket trailer campaign and was sold to the public with a fluency and rigour usually reserved for a Hollywood movie. The similarities in the sell are no coincidence, of course – it worked for *Spooks* (which returns in the autumn for a third series, has been sold to America and gets its own spin-off videogame this year), so the BBC is hoping to repeat the trick. To do so it has called upon the same production company, Kudos, which created *Spooks*. Indeed, the idea for *Hustle* came from one of the directors of that show. *Spooks* was itself a minor hustle – a triumph of overwrought mediocrity that always promised more than it delivered – but to the panjandrums at White City ratings don't lie, and *Spooks* has always performed well in that department. Unfortunately it has created a questionable template for future mainstream drama, in which the selling of a programme to the public is as important as its actual content. And so we get a custom-built ratings workhorse borne of the marketeers.

It is undeniable that *Hustle* gives the public what they want. It starts with a very simple sell – here are a group of brilliant conmen and each week they con someone. It borrows modern camera techniques from ads to create a stand-out look – like pausing the surrounding action while a character talks to camera. The casting and writing is equally designed to repay minimal attention. Every gang member has one memorable attribute – they are less characters, really, than characteristics – and they are sold as such. "Meet Danny. He's the new boy. But he's got to learn to go by the book." Likewise Stacie (beautiful), Mickey (brilliant), Ash, (technical) and finally Albert (Robert Vaughn). It worked for the A-Team, and best of all, such a pen-sketch ensemble does rather suit 30-second trailers.

"Do you think the Second World War is ever going to end?"

As far as the script is concerned, it is a barrage of one-liners glued together with jargon. That nicely dispenses with the need for any realistic dialogue while creating an easy inclusiveness, like a comic catchphrase. By episode two we know the difference between the "long" and the "short" con (the long con takes longer). We also know about "marks", "fixers", "cackle-bladders" and "ropers", and if we don't, then once again we may refer back to the interminable trailers because they are constantly hammering home the new idiom, too.

And the plots? Well, plunge viewers into a world about which they know nothing, other than that they'd like to know more, and again, you can barely go wrong. The Secret Service of *Spooks* was ideal, owing to its, er, secrecy. In the case of *Hustle*, the world of the con artist is similarly unknowable. But it gives the writers an empty vessel each week to fill with whatever unlikely plotting they choose.

All in all, the impression is of a drama written to fit a particular sell, rather than vice-versa. The BBC has been telling anyone who'll listen that *Spooks* and now *Hustle* are "cinematic". What they would like that to mean is visually diverting, effortlessly accomplished and ineffably cool. But the cinematic analogy works against them too – the film business has for many years been all about setting marketing spend against box office take. Films are reworked to satisfy test audiences, cast in moulds that are known to please most of the people, most of the time. So, too, with *Hustle* – it's likeable enough, in the way a ready-meal can sometimes be palatable, but drama produced when the trailer's already been written stifles the possibility of ever being surprising. In other words, the con is indeed on, and last week there were 6.7 million victims.

'The Zapper'

AD NAUSEAM

***EYE* 1073 introduced readers to Garry Lace, the Grey London chief executive and "larger than life character" ™ whose opening gambit upon his appointment was to sack a fifth of the workforce. Not a great way to make friends, some might say, especially when it was widely publicised that Lace himself was set to trouser an £800,000 pay-packet.**

Lace comes from the same sump as go-getters such as Trevor Beattie, admen who know that the best form of publicity is self-publicity. Which makes the developments of the last fortnight all the more intriguing. An email, purporting to be from Lace himself, has been doing the rounds in adland. In it, Lace announces that he is leaving the agency to set up a new loyalty scheme. It all seemed perfectly feasible, as Grey hold the Air Miles account, Lace is an old friend of Air Miles MD Drew Thompson, and only last year it was reported that Lace wanted to swap jobs with Thompson for a short time. Moreover, there have been rumours for several months now that Lace was working on a loyalty scheme with Thompson that was bizarrely similar to the one mentioned in the mysterious email.

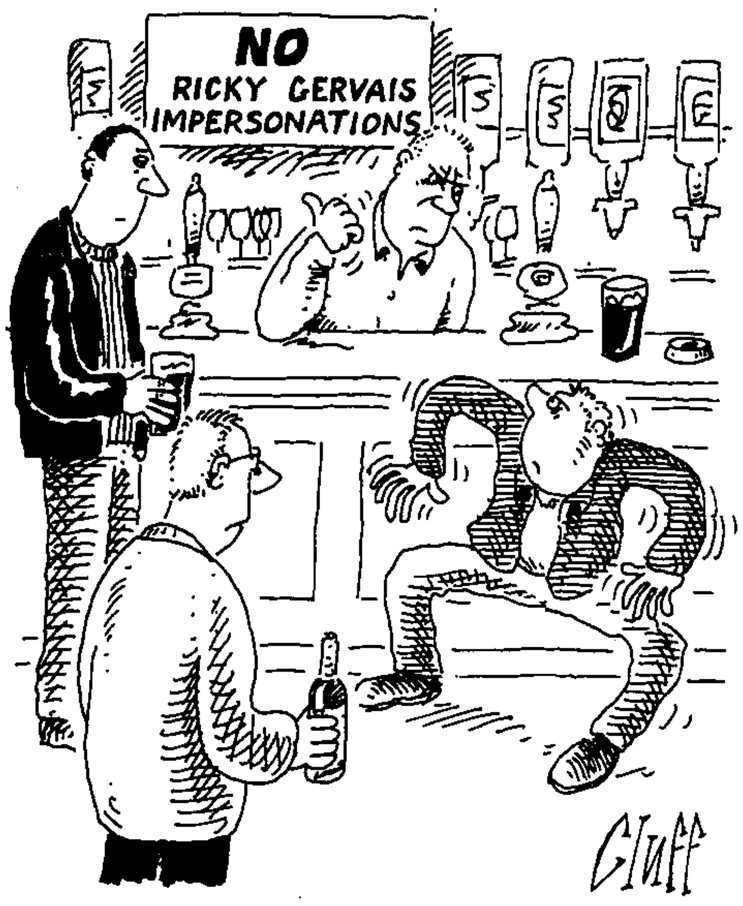
And yet Lace says the email is a hoax, and – utterly mystified as to why staff would plot against him when all he'd done was sack all their colleagues – has called in the police to investigate the matter. The *Eye* looks forward to discovering who was the perpetrator of such a heinous malfeasance, especially in light of the considered response of Carolyn Carter, Grey's European president: "As for Garry, I think it's made him more famous." Friends of Lace know that he'd be appalled at the very thought.

YOU'D HAVE thought that advertising bras would be fairly simple. Big posters full of knockers will always turn heads – how hard can it be?

Very hard, apparently: in the last few weeks Gossard called their fourth agency review in three years, after continual dissatisfaction at agencies producing ads that "pander to men". This from the company that brought us the "find your G spot" campaign.

FINANCIAL advertising's fundamental purpose is to paint what is actually a gamble as a surefire way of making money.

Though for some time advertisers have been forced to tag on the familiar refrain that "prices may go down as well as up" (ie "there's a 50-50 chance that everything we've just said is hogwash"), misleading ads in the financial sector remain rife, largely because financial products are a complex business and the companies that sell them prefer to keep it that way. In response, last week the Financial Service Authority trumpeted a clampdown on misleading ads, in which they claim to have rapped 63 firms. Very impressive, except that the FSA declined to name the transgressors. So those of us who may have been duped will never find out how. Some clampdown!



MEDIA NEWS

"THE BIG BRAINSTORM has shown that creativity can emerge from all areas of the BBC", trumpets the BBC's Big Brainstorm team – another tier of crap created by Greg Dyke.

So what's the "original programme idea" they've come up with after a day of straining by 300 people?

Called *I'm Alright Jack*, it's a documentary that will feature a "prosperous professional from the Home Counties" who accepts the challenge "to spend a week working in a homeless refuge". He had a hard time, "particularly with the smell", apparently, and it's coming to BBC2 soon.

But where did the "table of nine people plus facilitator" find their unique inspiration? Surely not from the dozens of programmes that have already shown us posh people patronising the "deprived", including two ITV docs presented by Matthew Parris (the first one more than 20 years ago), Michael Portillo's recent effort for BBC2, living in Merseyside on £80 per week and *Back To The Floor* on BBC 2, in which bosses visit "the bottom of their operation", etc, etc, etc.

AN E-MAIL from acting director-general Mark Byford has been sent to 1400 BBC Technology staff: "Anne Wilson, Managing Director of BBC Technology has today been dismissed following disciplinary procedures regarding misuse of hospitality expenses."

Byford adds: "I would ask that this information is not discussed with anyone outside BBC Technology."

This demand for privacy is odd, not least because Byford was happy to violate Wilson's right to any herself. The very next day, despite a right to appeal, news of Wilson's demise was all over the Beeb's in-house propaganda rag *Ariel*.

Wilson has been a fierce critic of the BBC's controversial decision to "outsource", i.e sell off BBC Technology to a company such as IBM or, horror of horrors, Crapita. She had many meetings with BBC execs at which she criticised the sale.

Her replacement, Adrian Corcoran, happily for Byford, is fully behind the privatisation scheme.

DUMB BRITAIN

National Lottery Jet Set, BBC1

Eamonn Holmes: Which chapel ceiling did Michelangelo famously paint?

Contestant: The sixteenth chapel.

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: The action of which Shakespeare play takes place between dusk on January 5th and dawn on January 6th?

Contestant: *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*

Beat The Nation, C4

Graeme Garden: Which Shakespeare play contains the quotation "A plague on both your houses"?

Contestant: *A Tale Of Two Cities.*

Garden: The Ashmolean in Oxford was England's first what?

Contestant: Indian restaurant.

DIRECTOR of News Richard Sambrook, who miraculously kept his job after Hutton, compares the BBC's present misfortunes "to the crisis at *The Times* 20 years ago when it bought the Hitler diaries only to discover they were fake".

In a lecture about accurate reporting he said: "Every so often a major news organisation makes a big and high profile mistake. None of us is immune."

Indeed. It was the *Sunday Times* that fell for the diaries con, not *The Times*.

STAFF at the BBC's Birmingham studios, where much of the corporation's daytime output is produced, are delighted at the latest evidence of daytime boss Alison Sharman's mission to "surprise and challenge" stay-at-home viewers.

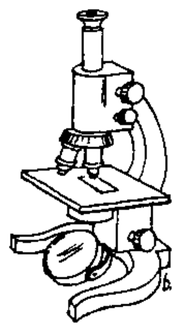
"The way we do normal everyday stuff is extremely interesting and we would like YOU to help us make a brilliant and entertaining new TV show", reads an email circulated to all staff. "What we want to know is: HOW DO YOU WASH YOUR CLOTHES? Maybe you're a bung it all in at once kind of a bloke… or a put it into a million piles person. Maybe you're the dry clean only type – including your undies! What about temperature? Powder? Liquid? Tray or ball?… However mundane and boring you think your laundry habits are, you'd probably be wrong and we really want to hear from you. Please email us at research@bbc.co.uk."

POST-Hutton, is the BBC getting carried away with trying to show both sides of every story?

"Electric toothbrushes may be better at removing plaque and preventing gum disease than manual brushes, according to a study," ran a story on the corporation's news website on 19 February.

Directly beside it, a banner directed readers to "SEE ALSO: Thumbs down for electric toothbrush", a link to a story from 21 January which revealed that "Most electric toothbrushes are no better for your teeth and gums than the traditional type, researchers have found."

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE



SO WHAT do we make of Woo Suk Hwang and Shin Yong Moon, the two South Koreans who claimed to have cloned 30 human embryos a couple of weeks ago – and furthermore to have used them to harvest lines of stem cells? This is the holy grail of scientists who hope to use the cloning technology to develop supplies of genetically-compatible tissues for brain repair and the like.

Hwang and Moon are no charlatans. Their work is published in *Science* and is totally kosher. What they said they have done, they have done. But their announcement, at a press conference in the US, still had a bizarre quality about it.

For a start, they had not managed to use the nuclear transfer technique successfully with male somatic cells. Something seems to go wrong with the human cloning process unless female cells are used. They were strangely reticent when questioned about this, and would not say how often they had tried cloning males. Furthermore, the cloned DNA, it turned out, came from cumulus cells taken from the healthy ovaries of young women. Despite all the headlines this is unlikely to be something that is going to lead to a cure for Alzheimer's any time soon. If it turns out that cloning only works for young fit women, its therapeutic uses may be limited to say the least.

'Boffin'

Number crunchings

£138m

■ Amount spent on advertising campaigns by government in last year

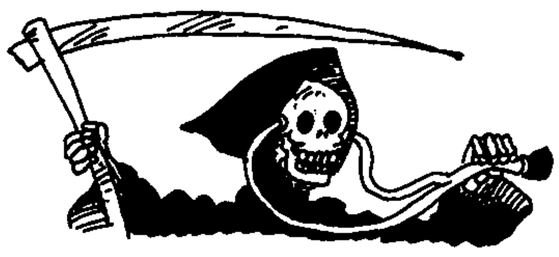
£138m

■ Amount spent on National Gallery, Victoria and Albert Museum, British Museum and National History Museum by government last year

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

ELVIS'S GRANDDAUGHTER HAS BECOME A MODEL!!
PEOPLE MIGHT SAY YOU'RE CASHING IN ON THE FAMILY NAME!
THAT'S SOOOO NOT TRUE!
FASHION GUNK
I'M DOING THIS BECAUSE ALL MY HEROES ARE "FASHION PEOPLE"
LIKE WHO?
FASHION GUNK
ERM...SOPHIE DAHL... JADE JAGGER.... ...STELLA McCARTNEY...
FASHION GUNK



DOING THE ROUNDS

THE GOVERNMENT'S emphasis on increasing patient choice sounds like a vote winner – but will it make the NHS any safer? As GP Dr Nick Summerton warns: "Choice is not necessarily synonymous with a better-quality service. Patients may choose to have their warfarin treatment monitored in the community, have their skin lesion excised in general practice or have sigmoidoscopy performed in the primary care trust diagnostic unit. But if the warfarin monitoring service has not signed up to the external quality control scheme, the skin lesion is not submitted for pathological examination or the sigmoidoscope used is rigid rather than flexible, then patients are being short-changed. Sadly these are all real examples... An ineffective or unsafe service is not a choice I want to offer to my patients."

Former health minister Lord Hunt, now chair of the National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA), has similar concerns: "Patients should consider their safety when exercising their right to choice of treatment. Or would they prefer to assume – as they do in the airline industry – that safety is a given and choice can be made on the basis of other factors?" Alas, the NHS is a far more complex and under-staffed organisation than the airline industry and safety can never be a given. Each year, 10 per cent of patients and staff are injured by the NHS, and the equivalent of a jumbo jet load of patients die every day from preventable errors in hospitals.

Doubtless Lord Hunt and the NPSA are on the case, but the vast majority of errors in the NHS are not picked up at take-off. According to the latest government figures, the number of deaths involving the MRSA superbug has increased from 51 in 1993 to 800 in 2002, while laboratory reports of MRSA blood poisoning increased from 210 to 5,309. It seems we have a long way to go before we can assume the safety of hospital hygiene.

● SOME specialities have made great strides in demonstrating safety. The survival statistics for child heart catheterisation and surgery from April 2000 to March 2001 in the UK's 13 centres have been independently validated and published (http://bmj.bmjjournals.com/onlinefirst_date.shtml). No detectable difference exists in survival rates between units, although the power to detect poor performance on a year's data is limited, especially in smaller units. However, the study has clearly shown that the traditional "30 days after surgery" mortality rate given to parents is doubled at one year. The chances of survival are still good – averaging 91.2 per cent at a year – but time and resources need to be devoted to long-term audit to give patients the best information on which to make choices on behalf of their children.

● HEART SURGERY is the one example where the NHS is getting its act together in providing meaningful information to patients. It took the Bristol disaster to kick start it and there has still been huge difficulty in attracting sufficient money for audit, but some centres have managed to translate complex statistics into information that patients can actually use (e.g. Papworth hospital's newsletters and website: http://www.papworth-hospital.org.uk/). Elsewhere it is almost impossible to find accurate, user-friendly information on the safety and quality of NHS services. Without it, the entire patient choice programme could be a huge and very costly stab in the dark.

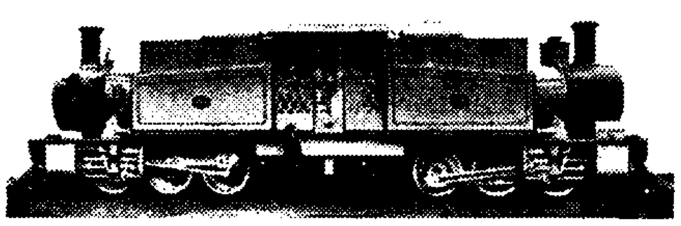
● MAGGIE KELLEHER, producer of Endemol's 12-week series *Fit Farm* for Channel 4, is looking for a GP to look after participants: "Ideally we'd like to cast a black doctor, to balance up what is a very white cast at the moment. An Asian doctor would also be great, although I feel an Asian doctor is verging on a stereotype. Again, our absolute preference is a black, female doctor but if this isn't possible, then the nearest thing to it." Interested? Phone Maggie on 0208 222 4425.

M.D

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

ACCORDING TO MY COLLEAGUE'S NOTES...
CLINK
HOW COME EVERY TIME I COME HERE I SEE SOMEONE NEW?
I KNOW EXACTLY HOW YOU FEEL
I'M YOUR NEW COST CONSULTANT ADMINISTRATOR...
HELLO, I'M YOUR SAVINGS FLOW THROUGH LIAISON OFFICER...



SIGNAL FAILURES

Land of milkin' money

PRIVATISATION and the "strategic" rail authority have managed to put rail finances into the same kind of mess that resulted in the Beeching cuts of the 1960s.

In the wake of Beeching, Labour transport minister Barbara Castle saved many loss-making trains by introducing grants in 1968 for specific "socially necessary" services, in recognition of their local benefits. By the late 1980s British Rail understood the costs in every area of its operations, which helped it control costs and assess and justify enhancements. The Intercity sector covered its costs, and the London commuter network wasn't far short. The main business sectors covered the bulk of infrastructure costs where "socially necessary" services shared the tracks.

Privatisation destroyed marginal costing. In the Sheffield area rail subsidy leapt from £4m in 1995 to £19m in 1996. The cost of local services in West Yorkshire rose from £14m to £43m and in Strathclyde from £35m to £100m. Lesser services were saddled with hefty rental bills for the same old trains (*Eyes passim*) and with expensive track fees related to the modern railway Railtrack would deliver. But Railtrack surrendered control of engineering costs and had no idea where money could be saved or spent cost-effectively. Its successor, Network Rail, has hardly begun tackling that deficiency and may need more than a decade to regain BR's understanding of costs.

Franchising brought a new way of cutting the subsidy cake. The most generous wads went to the first franchises to be let, South-West Trains and Great Western (which only a few years earlier were around break-even). Later franchises were awarded small subsidies as companies promised to make do with stupidly low amounts just to win franchises. Soon teetering on the brink of collapse, those franchises were — and are — bailed out by "new" Labour. This time the money's linked to the demands of private companies, not the social benefits of specific services. Subsidy is now about three times what BR got in its last year, while services are generally worse.

The most reckless franchise bids came from Richard Branson. So confident was he that he could do better than BR, he offered to pay big premiums instead of taking subsidy. Now Virgin is being bailed out with such staggering sums that two sections of the once unsubsidised Intercity network have leapfrogged the former recipients of Barbara Castle's grants. In 2002-03 each passenger on Virgin west coast was subsidised by nearly £12.50, despite big fares rises, and Virgin cross-country passengers were subsidised by more than £11.50 each. On Scotrail, which includes long routes through the lightly populated Highlands, subsidy per passenger was £3.36.

The SRA has lectured the industry on cost control but neither it nor the industry have the same knowledge of costs that BR had more than a decade ago. The SRA has set a fine example with its burgeoning payroll and consultancy fees rocketing from £4.8m in 2001 to £25.9m in 2003. Its latest idea is to spend up to £240,000 a year on external spin doctors, to supplement its own communications team (annual budget £850,000).

PS: Why does the SRA need consultants to sex up its message when its own spin doctors are so good at it already? Last month an SRA press release brought news that renewal of three nearly-expired franchises had stalled, so existing operators had been granted another two years while the SRA's army of bureaucrats got its act together. The title of this press release? "Franchising programme continues apace."

'Dr B. Ching'

THE COMMUTERS
THE WHOLE TRAIN IS COMPLETELY PACKED...
...APART FROM THIS ONE SEAT...
YES. BLOODY DRIVER IS MISSING AGAIN...
Saizelda

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

PIPE DOWN

RESIDENTS of a run-down London estate who worked for four years on a community-led redevelopment plan have been sold down the river by Hackney council. In another of the "hard choices" beloved of the borough's Labour mayor, Jules Pipe (*see Eye* 1100), the council has sold a piece of land vital to the plan to a private developer – putting hopes for the estate's regeneration back by years.

Thousands of residents on Hackney's Woodberry Down estate live in accommodation way below the government's "decent homes" standard. Dampness, drug dealers, vandalism, a huge backlog of repairs – the estate has the full checklist of problems. Deciding that they'd had enough, a group of tenants formed an Estate Development Committee (EDC) and came up with a redevelopment plan which, until this year, had the council's backing. It entailed building 350 homes on a derelict piece of land, the site of a former school. When built these homes would be used to "decant" residents while their original houses were being rebuilt.

Now the council has decided to cancel the community-supported plan and sell the school site to an unnamed developer for £17m. The developer will be free to sell 210 homes to the private sector, while providing just 120 "social housing" units. The original estate will be transferred to a housing association and rebuilt — eventually. But no housing association has been chosen and plans for the compulsory purchase of alternative sites for the "decanting" process are at a very early stage – so the whole process could take years.

Veronica Mensah, a member of the EDC, said the residents feel badly let down: "People who have devoted a lot of their time to planning for a positive future on this estate are now losing hope. The stress and anxiety which the state of housing here causes people is unbelievable. This, though, is typical of Hackney council."

● **A QUARTER of Durham's 40,000 population is made up of university students. With a shortage of accommodation on campus much of the housing in the old city centre has been taken over by them. This is a cause of some concern to the city council's Lib Dem leader, Sue Pitts. She told the *Municipal Journal* that landlords were setting aside houses for students to the extent that some streets had only two or three permanent households in them, which brought problems of isolation and "social exclusion" during holiday periods, especially at Christmas. "The housing situation is a real problem," Cllr Pitts told the magazine, "and it is something that we are attempting to address." Perhaps one way Ms Pitts could address it might be by considering letting the two properties she herself lets to students to someone else.**

BETTER UNDER LABOUR

THE Labour opposition on Westminster city council has, over the years, naturally made much political capital out of the embarrassment caused to the Tories by the gerrymandering activities of the council's former leader, Dame Shirley Porter (*Eyes passim*), during the "homes for votes" scandal of the 1980s. Last year Labour group leader Cllr Paul Dimoldenberg was still demanding an apology for the "deliberately misleading" replies he received from the council in the Eighties. He called for an Audit Commission inquiry into why the council had failed to find any of Shirley Porter's missing millions – the first step towards recovering the £39m Porter owes in surcharges arising from a damning district auditor's report. What Cllr Dimoldenberg failed to mention is that, as former Westminster district auditor John Magill points out in his latest "public interest report" on the matter: "Section 90 of the local government act 2000 repealed the powers of the courts and auditors to surcharge members and officers guilty of wilful misconduct causing loss and/or responsible for authorising or incurring unlawful expenditure." In other words, if the same thing had happened today under Labour, Porter and her cronies would not have faced any financial penalties at all!

● **SPINNER of the week: the Bath and North-east Somerset council spokeswoman who admitted that "over-ambitious" projections of savings from a privatisation deal had led to a £674,000 deficit in the council's leisure budget. No money was lost really, she explained. Rather, it was "budgeted for at the wrong time"!**

CULTURE VULTURES

IN 1994 Stoke-on-Trent councillors pledged £4.7m from town hall coffers to help fund what was dubbed the "cultural quarter project", involving the regeneration of two arts and entertainment venues. The rest of the estimated £22m required came from the national lottery (£16m), plus £1m from the European regional development fund.

The project was completed in 1999 and today both centres are thriving. The only problem was that the job came in £15m over budget – all of which had to be met from council coffers. The district auditor began a long investigation and has at last reported. Notable among the DA's findings are that 10 senior officers working for the city council broke the rules governing accepting hospitality from contractors, in this case Norwest Holst.

The "hospitality" included days on the golf course, go-karting, drinks, lunches and dinners, sometimes with spouses in tow. Among those at the trough were director of corporate resources Paul Brindley, head of asset development Gwyn Hobson and city secretary Mark Winstanley. The DA obtained the details of the freebies from Norwest Holst's records — all 10 officers having forgotten to declare them.

Brindley, Hobson and Winstanley have been suspended by Stoke's chief executive Ita O'Donovan, but the DA's report is vague about who might have been responsible for the huge overspend, which "diverted funds from front-line services". It was, apparently, due to three factors. Firstly, £1.7m was accounted for — or rather not accounted for — by that old standby "miscellaneous expenses". Then there was a series of "overspends", amounting to £5.6m. Last but by no means least, nearly £8m was blown on a legal dispute with the project's architects, Levitt Bernstein Associates (LBA). LBA had warned that Norwest Holst lacked experience of jobs of this scale and had claimed for additional costs caused by this, which the council refused to pay. The council fought the action and lost, and filed a counter-claim, which it also lost.

The DA concludes that despite having found "no evidence that the award of hospitality influenced the council's attitude towards Norwest Holst, it is clear that the close working relationship [of the council] with Norwest Holst did not create an impression of impartiality and did not serve to strengthen relationships between Norwest Holst and LBA". If only those architects had liked golf!

● **THE Order of the Brown Nose is awarded to Ray Davies, a Labour councillor on Caerphilly district council, who has called for a statue to be erected to the former Welsh Secretary and the town's former MP, Ron Davies, in gratitude for "his role in bringing devolution to Wales". Last week Ron joined a new political party, Forward Wales, after quitting Labour in January. He resigned from the Cabinet in 1998 after "a moment of madness" with a man on Clapham Common, then quit the Welsh Assembly last year after being photographed by *The Sun* "looking for badgers" at a gay cruising spot near Bath. But where to put the statue? Caerphilly, Clapham and Bath will all no doubt want to fight for the honour. And there's always the empty plinth in Trafalgar Square...**

LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELDS

YET ANOTHER school site and a public open space look set to fall prey to rampant development as Suffolk county council prepares to shift a primary school onto nearby playing fields and pile new housing into the historic school site.

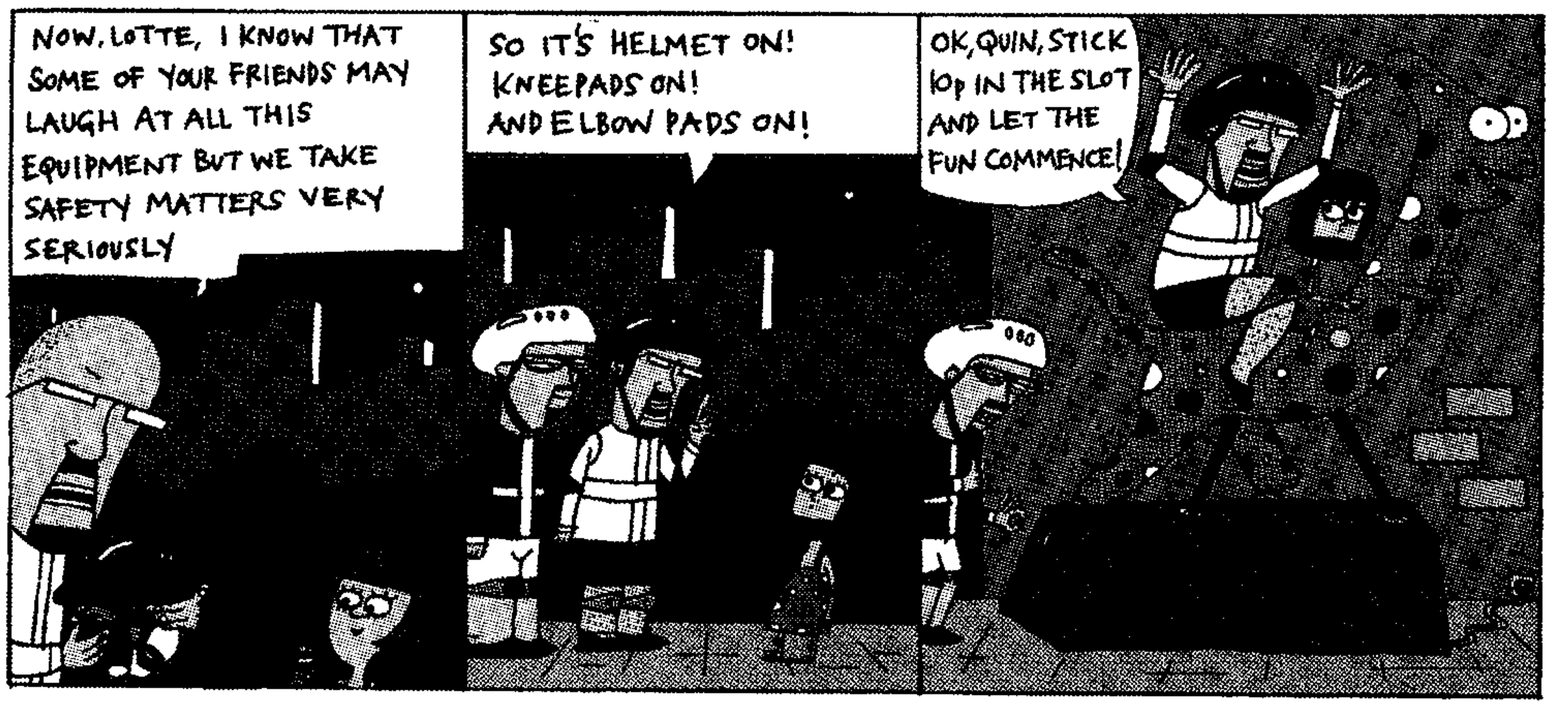
Suffolk wants to move Woodbridge primary school from its town centre site to new buildings, which are to be constructed on playing fields half a mile away. The former school site would be used for a development of 23 houses and flats, with the old school building converted into a library, through a partnership with G&E (Woodbridge) Ltd – a company set up by local developers Greystoke and Everleigh.

Suffolk coastal district council's local plan notes of the playing field site: "Because of the contribution which the site currently makes to the character of the area, only the development of such an essential facility as a school will override the need to retain the site in its open undeveloped form." In fact the county council has already flogged off a large portion of land adjoining the playing fields for housing. Had they not done so, the school could have been built next to the playing fields with no loss of outdoor public space.

The county council claims it would cost £1.1m to do up the existing building – money it can ill-afford – and that spiralling property prices in the area mean that the cost of putting up a new school on the playing field would be covered by the cash they get out of the development. However, residents say moving the school will rip the heart out of the town centre. They are also concerned about the design of the new housing and how it will fit into the area, which is right next to a conservation area.

Greystoke and Everleigh have made an interesting choice of relatively untested architects for the project, in local firm Alexander and Miller. Could the choice possibly have had anything to do with the fact that one of G&E's two directors is architect Robert Alexander, of, er, Alexander and Miller?

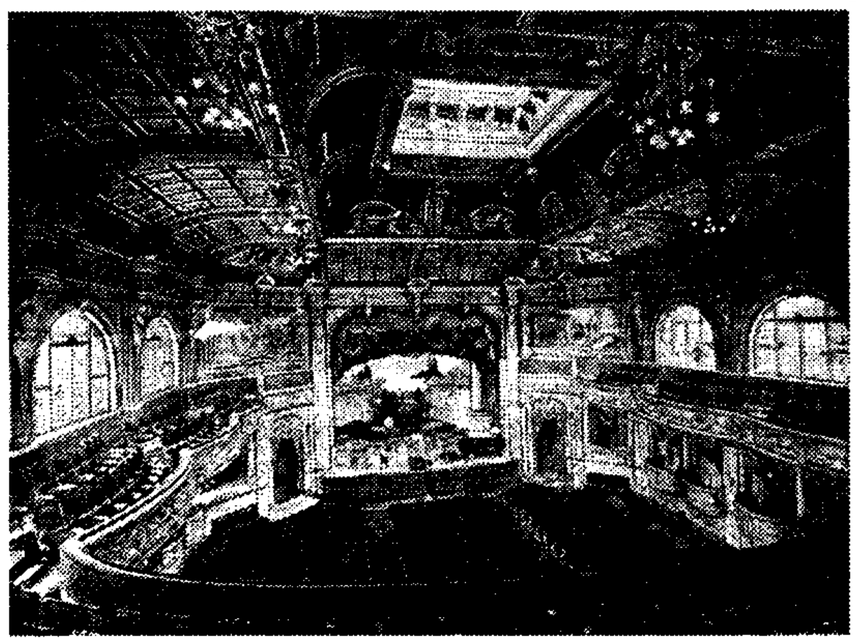
IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER


NOW, LOTTE, I KNOW THAT SOME OF YOUR FRIENDS MAY LAUGH AT ALL THIS EQUIPMENT BUT WE TAKE SAFETY MATTERS VERY SERIOUSLY
SO IT'S HELMET ON! KNEEPADS ON! AND ELBOW PADS ON!
OK, QUIN, STICK 10p IN THE SLOT AND LET THE FUN COMMENCE!

NOOKS and CORNERS

THERE'S a strange tale of looking a gift horse in the mouth. Harrogate is an agreeable former spa in North Yorkshire, famous for its gardens, toffee and sulphur water. Another of its glories is the Royal Hall, formerly the *Kursaal* (the name was changed in 1914 to remove Hunnish associations).

Designed by Frank Matcham, the *doyen* of Edwardian theatre architects, in collaboration with R J Beale, it was opened in 1903. Until recently it was the only *kursaal* intact and in use in Britain, staging opera, dance, music, theatre and much else. Matcham was a genius at combining innovative, functional structures with ebullient theatrical architecture. What Pevsner described as "a cheerful building" is listed at Grade II*. Unfortunately, the Royal Hall has been closed since 2002 owing to structural problems.



The Royal Hall is much-loved in Harrogate. A restoration trust was founded and the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) offered money – but not enough to satisfy the owners of the building, Conservative-controlled Harrogate borough council. Last year the council commissioned a report on a full restoration and refurbishment scheme, and found that this would cost £13.7m. As the HLF had offered £6m and the council proposed to put up £2.6m, there was a considerable shortfall. So the council asked for more from the HLF, only to be told that enough was enough: the structural problems could certainly be dealt with for £8.6m. The HLF, English Heritage and the Restoration Trust all asked the council to come up with a reduced scheme. The council, however, is set on full restoration or nowt. It has announced that, if it cannot be funded, then nothing will happen and the Royal Hall will be mothballed. And then, of course, it will simply become derelict and decay further, leading to higher restoration costs – or worse.

Adjacent to the Royal Hall is the so-called Harrogate International Centre, a brash assembly of structures of no architectural merit which opened in 1982. The centre would dearly love a new exhibition hall, and so would the council. This could, of course, go on the site of the Royal Hall, were it to close permanently. Is it this vision, rather than mere Yorkshire bloodymindedness, which explains the council's attitude over the Royal Hall? Who knows? But there certainly seems to be a conflict of interest. Mike Gardner, the leader of the council, also happens to be chairman of the board of the Harrogate International Centre.

The HLF's £6m is still on offer, but this is the only opportunity Harrogate will have of receiving such a generous grant, as the Fund's rules are being changed yet again (social inclusion and such "new" Labour cant). Perhaps someone needs to point out to Harrogate council that it has a legal obligation to maintain and repair the listed buildings in its ownership. It also seems idiotic to abandon the Royal Hall now when two of Frank Matcham's theatres – the Hackney Empire and the Coliseum – have recently been so triumphantly restored.

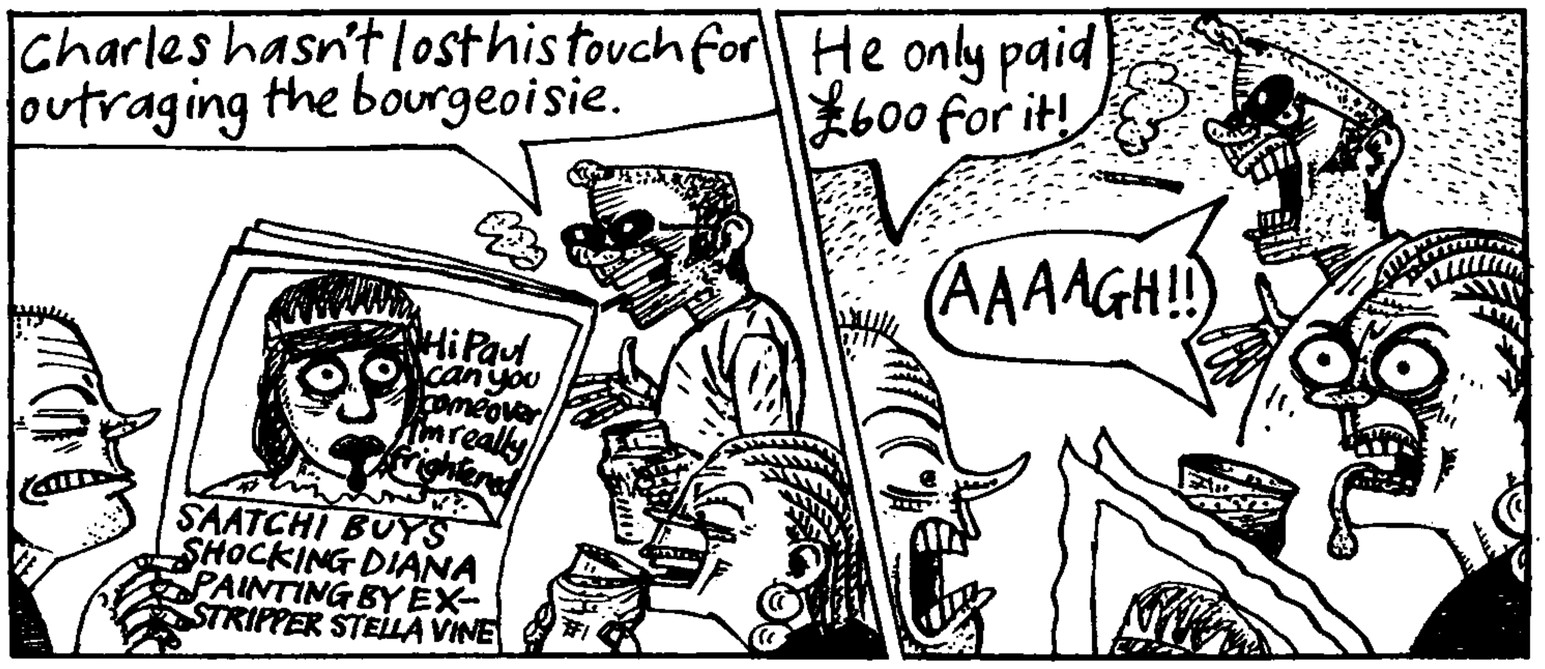
TALKING of English Heritage, I am sorry to report that its staff may soon be homeless as their roof has been sold from over their heads by the Department of Culture, Media 'n' Sport. EH occupy 23 Savile Row – known as "Fortress House" until Sir Jocelyn Stevens decided the name gave a bad image to the organisation to which he gave such lustre. This stone-clad building block was built in 1949-50 and designed by Curtis Green, Son & Lloyd in a sort of semi-modern monumental classical manner. It is a rare building of its date, built under the Lessor scheme which waived restrictions on private developers if the resulting office block was immediately occupied by a government department. And the design is interesting, although the building is unlisted. English Heritage lease Fortress House from the DCMS for about £1m a year; the DCMS lease it from its owners for £60,000 per annum. (Something wrong there, shurely?)

Westminster city council has just granted planning permission to Legal & General Assurance Society Ltd to demolish Fortress House and build a "mixed" development of offices, residential space and shops by Eric Parry (not a bad architect, but that is scarcely the point) enhanced by a nice art work by the American sculptor Joel Shapiro. There was no submission from English Heritage: staff who might make a case for late Curtis Green (architect of the Dorchester Hotel &c.) were firmly gagged. But Legal & General is an insurance company, so who is the obliging enabling developer? Why Stanhope plc, whose chairman, our old friend Sir Stuart Lipton, also happens to be chairman of Cabe, the Commission for the Built Environment. That means, of course, that we are bound to get a really good new building which meets Cabe's high and exacting standards (er, see Eye 1094 on South Kensington station). So there is nothing to worry about.

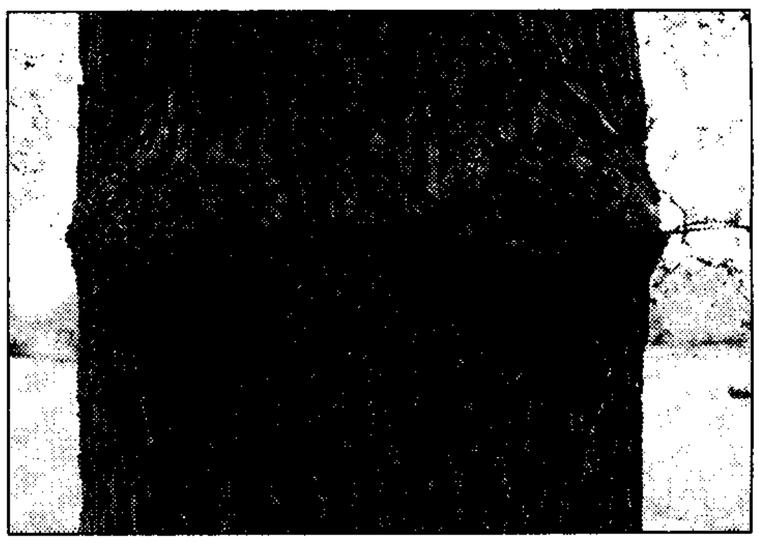
'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH


Charles hasn't lost his touch for outraging the bourgeoisie.
Hi Paul can you come over I'm really frightened
SAATCHI BUYS SHOCKING DIANA PAINTING BY EX-STRIPPER STELLA VINE
He only paid £600 for it!
AAAAGH!!

I-SPY *Brocket Hall, Herts*



Submitted by Neal A. Dawson. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC AND MUSICIANS

WHEN English National Opera finally opened the doors of the refurbished Coliseum last week it was to carefully orchestrated oohs and aahs of wonder at the new interiors. And with reason. In their kitschy way they look quite good. But this is surface glamour. Penetrate beyond the pass door and you'll find that ENO remains a demoralised company.

Having just been bailed out of bankruptcy (according to the chairman, Martin Smith) with an extra £10m of public money from the Arts Council, it has promptly lost £280,000 through the staggered farce of postponing, then cancelling, then reducing to a one-off performance and finally delivering as a 15-minute soundbite, its re-opening production of *Nixon in China*. It has also jettisoned the first two shows of *Rhinegold*, for which audiences and performers have to be compensated. And although Smith has been telling people that the £41m renovation will come in on budget, not everyone agrees. Only a few weeks ago he was saying it would come in on time, and we know how accurate that claim turned out to be.

Which raises the question of where proper leadership resides at ENO? Its music director Paul Daniel has already resigned after what he called a "distressing" year and is counting the days until his contract lets him leave. He has made his opinion of the chairman clear ("a pain in the arse"). And the degree of hostility between Martin Smith and just about everyone at ENO filtered through at the official ENO re-opening night – another farce, appropriately described as a "surprise event" because no one knew until the last minute what (if anything) was happening. It turned out to be embarrassingly vacuous, with nothing but those 15 minutes of *Nixon* slipped into an unendurable sequence of self-congratulatory speeches. Smith repeatedly and tellingly referred to the ENO company as "they" rather than "us".

As for Sean Doran, the new chief exec, he hasn't made a great impression. He has begun by allowing in the coming year a revival of the universally deplored Callixto Bieto *Don Giovanni*: the production that provided ammunition for the firing of his predecessor.

Meanwhile, ENO is facing the biggest threat in its history from Raymond Gubbay, who is poised to lure away its casual audience (a big percentage of the box office) with English-language performances of standard operas just across the road at the Savoy Theatre. Gubbay claims he's not at war with ENO, but comments that he made last year – demanding the resignation of senior management on the grounds that it was "obscene to see how much money is wasted by ENO" – suggest otherwise. Gubbay has a lot to say in public, and he isn't always right. But on this occasion he was close enough. The Coliseum's smart new building is inhabited by a shambolic management, swallowing public money like there's no tomorrow. And there may well not be.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Letters

Points failure

Sir,

In Eye 1100 you suggest that Jarvis was "responsible for the Potters Bar rail disaster". Please note that, more than 21 months after the derailment, neither the HSE, nor the British Transport Police, has been able to establish the root cause of how this set of points came to fail so catastrophically, or where responsibility lies. We want to know the cause of the Potters Bar accident and we continue to assist the investigations in every way we can. Our own internal investigations have shown no failure by our maintenance staff in their operation of the systems and procedures laid down by the industry.

Yours faithfully,
MIKE TATE,
Head of Corporate Media Relations, Jarvis.

Sir,

Has anyone noticed the similarity between the new name for Jarvis' PFI company Engenda and the word Endanger, which means to put people's lives at risk? They obviously can't be related.

Yours etc,
NAME & ADDRESS WITHHELD.

Knacker's in the money

Sir,

In issue 1100 as part of your HP Sauce column you state that Customs investigators are paid more than police officers, in fact the reverse is true. As an officer of the trade union which represents investigation staff I would like to put the record straight.

Depending on their grade the basic pay of Customs investigators is between £20,000 and £35,000 per annum before overtime. The basic pay, before overtime, of our police colleagues at all ranks is approximately one third higher.

We look forward to our members getting police rates of pay when the new agency is up and running and the correct facts being published in your letters section.

Yours faithfully,
DAVE STONE,
Public and Commercial Services Union.

Heavy reading

Sir,

Re: Letters, Eye 1100. Geoff Dossetter's total costing for a 85 percent laden 44 tonne lorry makes interesting reading. His total of £28,500 for a year's trucking is a bargain, at £762 per tonne per year on the taxpayers' road.

However, my Astra would cost £6,975 for the same mileage per year, making my costs £6,975 per tonne, per year.

Remind me which one does the more damage to the M6 and other motorway surfaces?

LAWRENCE ATTRILL,
Farnborough, Hants.

Spockalike

Sir,

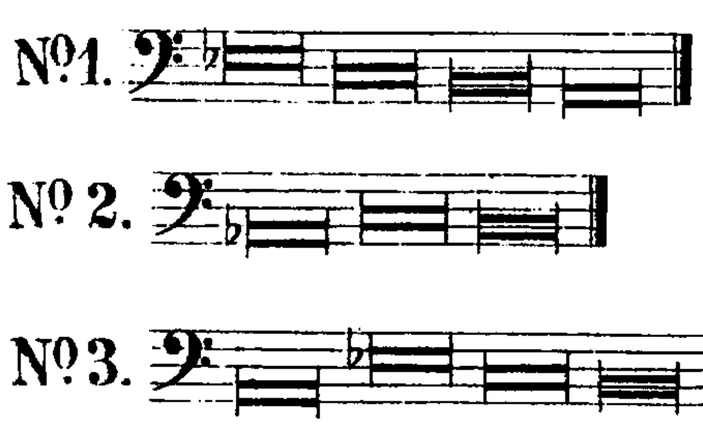
Is Clare Short a Vulcan?

Best wishes,
JONATHAN HARVEY,
Oxford.

Taking the pianissimo

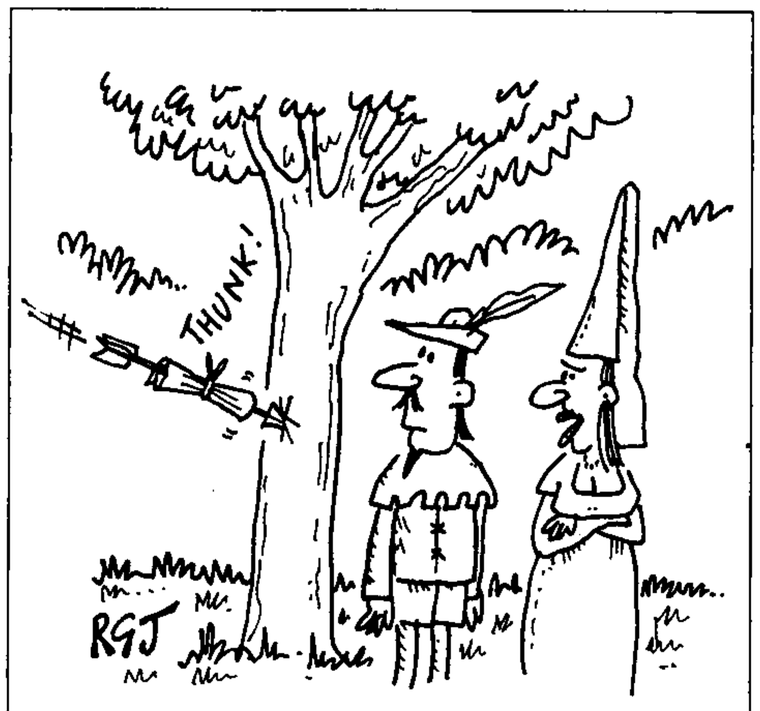
Sir,

Admirably early as Mr Ferguson's example of Alphonse Allais' 'Funeral March for the burial of a great Deaf Man' may be, Robert Schumann's 'Sphinxes' from 'Carnaval' (composed 1834-5) are even earlier. These three silent one-bar pieces consist of rests spelling out SCHA (the musical notes, in German, of Schumann's name) and ASCH, the name of the hometown of the girl he loved. I'm very fond of them, as they're the only pieces from 'Carnaval' I can play.

Yours sincerely,
SIMON REES,
Welsh National Opera.

Sir,

Alphonse Allais, composer of the noteless Great Deaf Man's funeral music, also exhibited at one of the early Paris Impressionist exhibitions a plain white card entitled "Anaemic Young Girls Walking To Their First Communion Through The Snow".

MICHAEL GROSVENOR MYER,
Cambridge.



"For God's sake, Robin, can't you get your mates to stop text messaging you?"

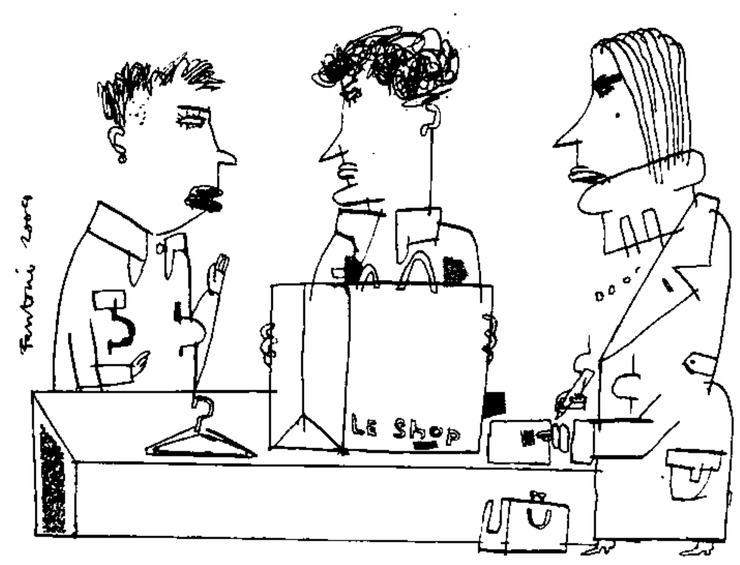
Trout's off

Sir,

I must say I am tired of the old cod that is regularly served up Down on the Fish Farm by Old Trout. But surely Ed., Old Trout has gone too far (Eye 1100) when he appears to claim that all Scottish fish farming and related jobs should be reserved for Real Scots from Scotland. Strange to see these bigoted views in the Eye. Indeed, how does Old Trout think the Scottish Fish Farming Industry can have an annual production in excess of 130,000 tonnes of salmon without creating a substantial number of jobs in rural areas? I often wonder, why oh why do Old Trout and the Eye apparently blindly join the eco-fascist campaign against fish farming?

Sincerely,
NEIL DUNCAN,
Via email.

Scenes You Seldom See



"I can see you are busy serving a customer, Michelle, so I'll come back for a chat later"

Da Ali C Show

Sir,

As a regular Eye reader, I very much enjoy the deserved constant stick you give to Alastair Campbell, swine that he is. In issue 1100, for example, I thought the Heath cartoon on Alastair Campbell's "Audience with..." tour amusing. Yet a few pages later, to my horror, and I'm sure other readers' too, there was his smirking face leering at us in an advert for his no-doubt awful show. To comment on his integrity on one hand, while the other hand lets him make money is both hypocritical and everything Private Eye, I thought, despised. Please don't encourage him!

Yours faithfully,
RORY MCLEOD,
Via email.

LUVVIES

The singer [Norah Jones] doesn't watch television that often, she said, and doesn't even have cable. Instead, she prefers to read.

"I've always loved to read, but sometimes I go for a year without reading a book because I forget to, or I don't have a book that I can get into easily," she said.

AP Entertainment News

Submitted by Andrew Berry.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Lookalike

Alice

Marina

Sir,

Have any of your other readers noticed the similarity between Marina Hyde (Guardian Diary contributor and columnist) and Alice (the rather thick one) from the esteemed 'comedy' programme the Vicar of Dibley. Are they related or indeed the same person? I think we should be told.

Yours faithfully,
SIMON EDWARD,
London SW9.

Badger baiting

Sir,

Re: Down on the Farm (Eye 1100). About two-and-a-half years ago, as I recall, you were staunchly defending the badger against culling because you did not believe that it caused the spread of TB amongst cattle. In the latest issue of your august publication, I note in the above column a volte-face: "Subsequent research has confirmed this (i.e. 'strong evidence for an association between TB and badgers')."

Surely the two conflicting sentences of 2004 and 2002 could be placed beside each other in an aptly titled "Just Fancy That" piece?

Yours faithfully,
ERIC BROWN,
Washingborough, Lincoln .

Sir,

I don't think there is any doubt as to whether badgers can carry TB, we "badger-people" aren't arguing that. Or that TB in cattle is on the increase. But who is to say that it isn't the cows giving it to the badgers?

First of all, there is no evidence that badgers give TB to cattle – that was the point of the Krebs trial in the first place – to try to ascertain whether or not there is a link. Six years and thousands of dead badgers later they have concluded that it gets worse if they go from farm-to-farm in infected areas!

Secondly, it seems obvious to most rational people that transporting cattle up and down the country, leasing out bulls to have their wicked way with every female cow in the district and bad animal husbandry are far more likely to increase the spread of the disease than a few cute, stripy animals!

A mass cull of badgers is not a solution, the solution (if humans can't get past their dependence on exploiting other animals for their meat and milk) is to develop a vaccine against TB (they managed it for humans a long time ago) and to use it in conjunction with regular TB testing.

And if badger numbers have trebled in recent years, then that is presumably as a positive result of them being a protected species. If white rhino numbers trebled would that not be a cause for celebration?

JO ROBERTSON,
Somerset.

Sir,

Forking through Muckspreader's latest pile of steaming excrement, I see he (or she?) is yet again attacking animal rights activists, with typical sneering jibes about their concern for Mr Brock, Ratty, Moley and of course the fox. The only way to prevent TB in cattle, he says, is to slaughter the badger population. He seems to be serious, unless I've missed the point and this is just a sick joke.

A better solution would be to stop farming animals altogether. Apart from preventing an enormous amount of animal suffering, this would have other benefits. It would free the land for the production of various food crops, a more rational, humane, productive and healthy use of resources. The NHS would benefit from an improvement in public health as our massive intake of animal fats declined, and the frequent health scares caused by infected animals (BSE, TB, foot and mouth, salmonella etc) would became a thing of the past.

A bit too radical for Muckspreader and his customers, alas, but perhaps it will happen one day.

Yours sincerely,
DEREK GREATREX,
Caversham, Berkshire.

Lookalike

Perry

Rantzen

Sir,

Please find attached lookalikes of Grayson Perry (Turner Prize tranny guy) and Esther Rantzen. I think maybe Esther is Grayson's best work of art yet!

LISA FRANKS,
Fishponds, Bristol.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"The final? If United and Arsenal get through the quarter-finals and can avoid themselves in the semis..."
MARK LAWRENSON, BBC
(Roy Smith)

"He [Steven Gerrard] wears his shirt on his sleeve..."
Liverpool fan, Radio 5 Live
(Chris Campling)

"There are more questions than answers being asked at the moment."
STAN COLLYMORE, Radio 5 Live
(Caspian Richards)

"Thistle will need to score at least once if they want to win this game."
SANDY CLACK, BBC1 Scotland
(Jack Corps)

"Yellow card for the dive, red card for the sending off..."
STEVE McCLAREN, Sky Sports One
(Fred Dale)

Live and kicking

Sir,

Henry Russell (Letters, Eye 1100) is under the misapprehension that there were no live league games on TV before Sky got the Premiership in 1992-3.

*We **did** get to see 1st (now Premier) division games live on BBC1 (Friday evenings) and ITV (Sunday afternoon) from the early 1980s. Moreover, in the last season of the old First Division (1991-2) when Leeds were champions, several of their games were shown live on terrestrial TV – I bitterly remember, as a Man Utd fan, seeing them hit Sheffield Wednesday for six and virtually win the league by beating Coventry – live on TV.*

And who can forget the 1989 Liverpool v. Arsenal clincher shown live, and free, on ITV?

JONATHAN WILLIAMSON,
Crookes, Sheffield.

Pedant of da week

Sir,

It is always embarrassing when the oldies get down on the dance floor, as Cyclops proves (Crossword 255, 3 down "According to rapper, newspapers get a person down" = depress). Any fule kno that the (North American) rapper's transformation of "the" is "da" (as in the quintessential homeboy film, Boyz in Da Hood). The "de" that Cyclops is looking for will be found in Caribbean-origin vocal music: reggae, ragga, toasting or chatting. A good place might be Linton Kwesi Johnson, or our own recently non-honoured Benjamin Zephania (sic).

Yours faithfully,
ANDREW "KINGSTON" CLARK,
Paris.

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

LUVVIES

She's been filmed starry-eyed in Paris for *Sex and the City*'s last ever instalment, but Sarah Jessica Parker was anxious not to read the script's final pages, "I don't think I'm emotionally capable of handling whatever the last image is".

Radio Times

Submitted by Emily Rose.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Letter from **Tehran**

from Our Own Correspondent

SO IT'S FAREWELL, then, to our reform movement. It has been deposited in the dustbin of history after offering us brief hope of a better future.

In the end, the reformists were no match for the determination of the mullahs, who used every trick in the book to maintain their power and ensure that their massive business interests continue to flourish. After exercising their constitutional right to ban any candidates they don't like from running, the hardliners stormed to victory in parliamentary elections and overturned the reformist majority in parliament. Our Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, declared the elections "free and fair" – just days after two newspapers were closed down for having dared to criticise him.

The result is hardly a surprise. Since our courteous but weak president Mohammad Khatami was re-elected for a second term in 2001, the writing has been on the wall for his reformist supporters. His power has been steadily usurped by the hardliners, embodied in the 12 ancient clerics who preside over the Council of Guardians, Khamenei's power-base.

Our mullahs are masters of hypocrisy: they talk of the need to protect the poor and dispossessed as they shovel hundreds of millions of dollars into offshore bank accounts. They lash out at American cultural depravity, while their sons sell us satellite dishes that allow us to watch all the latest soaps. And they fly first-class on Western airlines while ordinary Iranians – those who can afford to fly at all – have to put up with hazardous domestic carriers.

Now that they don't have an opposition to worry about, the hardliners may decide to make overtures to the Great Satan, which recently made peace with another former pariah, Gaddafi. This could be the moment for former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the pistachio magnate who got to know the US Republicans in the mid-1980s when he played a key role in the Iran-Contra scandal. Another man to watch is the head of the Supreme National Security Council, Hasan Rowhani, who some of us believe will become Iran's next president. Rowhani helped defuse a potential crisis over our nuclear programme, brokering a deal with the British, French and Germans (much to the annoyance of Washington) to allow snap inspections of our facilities. But all our good work could be brought down by our friend from Pakistan, A Q Khan, who appears to know a thing or two about our nuclear purchases.

Britain, one of our key allies, seems prepared to give us the benefit of the doubt. We have a love-hate relationship with the Brits, who played such a controversial role in our country before the revolution. Our conspiratorial minds detect the hand of Britain working nefariously behind the scenes. HMG likes to play both sides in Iran: it cosies up to the reformists but does business with the hardliners. British companies are quite active in Tehran now, talking to those delightful *bonyads*, religious foundations which have never suffered the indignity of an audit because their ultimate boss is the Supreme Leader. Our conservatives also have influential friends such as Lords Temple-Morris and Lamont on the board of the Iran-British chamber of commerce. Lamont is director of an Iranian-owned company, the Balli Group, whose boss was recently jailed for fraud. Last year the chamber helped organise a conference on Iran at Chatham House which was co-sponsored by our friends from India, the Hinduja brothers.

How will Britain and our other European allies react to the latest political shenanigans in Iran? They will make some veiled criticisms, for sure, but not much beyond that. Their banks and oil companies will continue to knock on our door, and we will welcome them with open arms. The hardliners will try and put on a more acceptable face to foreigners, toning down the rhetoric and saying the right things. But their contempt for the people will not change. That's for certain.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "It's not an issue of second-class passengers making do with less light, but a matter of affordability," Mr Pandey of Western Railway told reporters in Mumbai. "This is pure economics, and it is not at all unfair. From now on, our first class compartments will be fitted with hundred watt lights, but the second class compartments will only have sixty watt lights. Considering that an average second class fare is one-third of a first class fare, they ought by rights to be getting only thirty-three watts. So in reality, our administration is being kind and generous in giving them almost double that power, with no matching increase in fares."

Asked if this policy would be extended to other amenities, Mr Pandey continued, "Sure. We have a number of ideas which will be taken up in stages for implementation. Take the case of fans. The second class already have fewer fans, naturally, but a commuter standing under the fan in second class currently receives as much air as a first class passenger similarly placed.

"So, to reflect the difference in fares, we are planning to reduce the speed of fan rotation in second class compartments, and our engineering department is currently modifying their design." *(The Times of India, 7/3/1990. Spotter: Graeme and Michelle Forbes)*

– ● –

● *"Our research indicates that the majority of 'anal shovers' seeking medical assistance are between forty and sixty years old," a spokesman for the University Medical Centre in Leiden told Dutch reporters. "Furthermore, fruit, vegetables, bottles, billiard balls, light bulbs, paperweights, Barbie dolls, church candles and screwdrivers are the objects most commonly inserted.*

"For years, stories about surgeons removing cucumbers or bottles from bodily orifices have generally been regarded as silly pub stories. But they're not, which is why we are now making the first serious medical study of this strange but very real phenomenon.

"We've found that most shovers are so ashamed of their predicament that they will not admit to their GP that they have inserted these objects into themselves. A common excuse is that they 'fell onto' the offending object. One GP told us that a man had recently come into his surgery with a can of shaving cream stuck up his rectum. His story was that he had slipped on the bathroom floor and landed on the can, and he clung desperately to that version of events, despite its inherent implausibility. Not least because the can had three feet of battery wire wrapped around it.

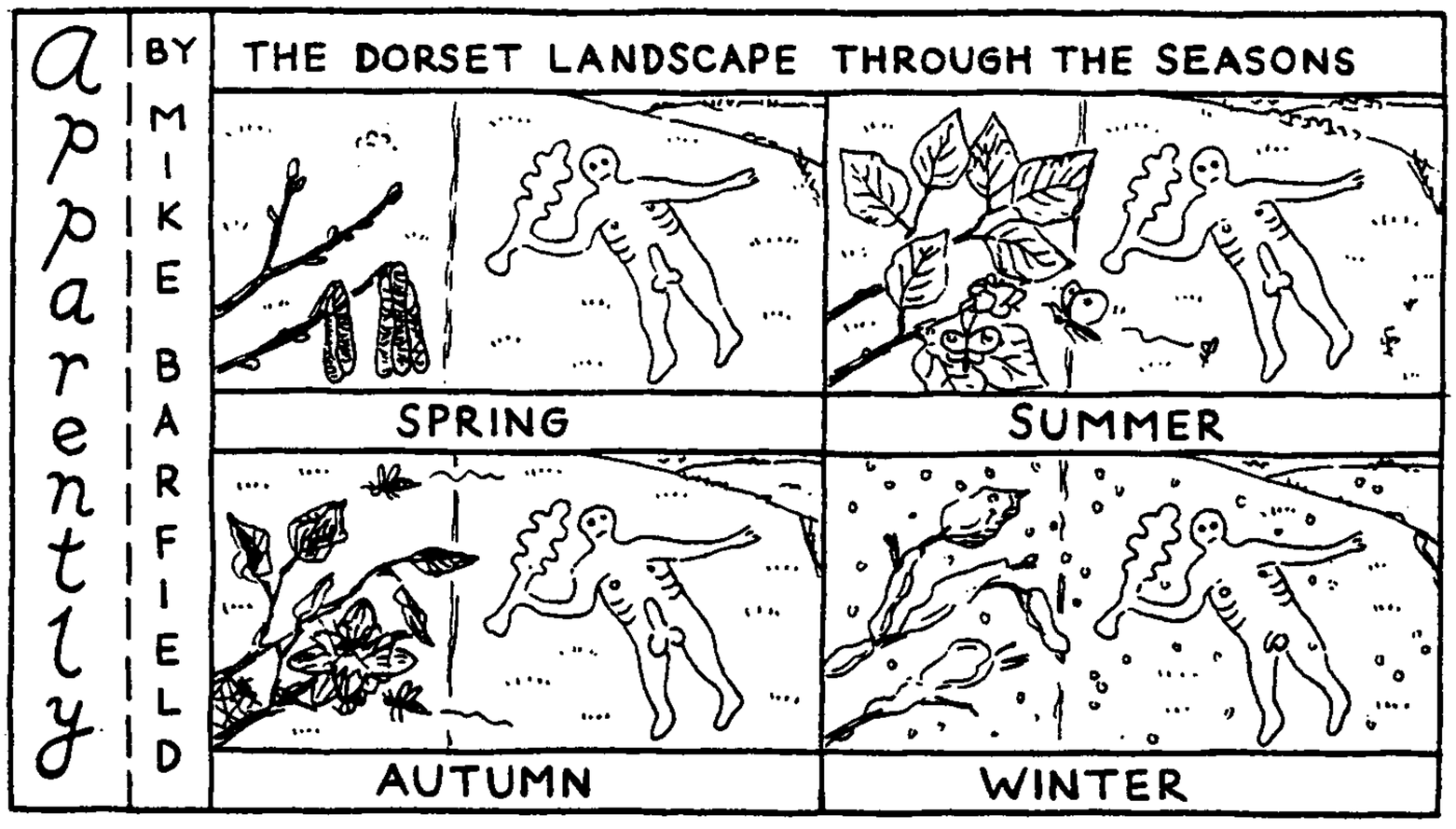
"Our most recent case involved a fourteen-year-old boy, who reported to the casualty department with a full can of kumquat juice wedged right up his anus. The doctors in casualty could not remove it, so he had to be put under anaesthetic and taken to the operating theatre, where the can was drained of its contents, squashed with a clamp, then removed. When he regained consciousness, all the boy would tell us was that 'I'm going through a difficult experimental phase,' and that the can had been there for two days." (De Telegraaf, 26/11/03. Spotter: P. C. Meredith)

– ● –

● "I believe that the only reason I smoke and drink every day, and my wife is overweight, is because we've watched TV every day for the past four years," Timothy Dumouchel told a press conference in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. "Charter Communications are at fault because I asked them to disconnect our cable connection four years ago, and they didn't do it. They are to blame, so I'm suing them for $5,000 and a lifetime supply of free Internet service. Is that unreasonable?"

Dumouchel was speaking after filing a law suit against his local cable tv supplier, accusing the company of making his wife fat and turning his children into lazy channel surfers. "Charter Communications did not let me make a decision as to what was best for myself and my family. In 1999, I phoned them several times and asked them to disconnect me, because I felt we were all getting addicted to television. But although they took us off their billing system, they didn't disconnect us, and the cable stations kept coming into the house. We all became helpless addicts of the free cable service, thanks to Charter. Tobacco companies are held responsible for turning their customers into addicts, so why not cable companies?"

However, Charter's head of public relations, John Miller, rejected the argument. "Even though we consider our services to be a very powerful entertainment product, I don't think it's reached a medical level yet where it could be proved to be addictive. But in our society, any kind of legal action shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone." *(Fond du Lac Reporter, 7/1/04. Spotter: Andy Davison)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

And the "good news" this week, contrary to what you may have been hearing around the parish, is that I'm back, I'm fighting fit and, in the words of the Blessed St Margaret, Our Lady of the Handbag, "I'm glad to be going on and on and on"!

Isn't that a suitably joyous message for this time of Lent? When so many people are giving up, I for one am not!

Can I quote you another comforting passage from the Good Book? "I will be with you always" (*Book of Job for Life*)

Isn't that reassuring to know – that whatever else may change in this fast-changing world, your vicar has every intention of remaining a pillar of strength, with no reverse gear!

And I'm glad to say that this message is beginning to get through to our parish team, even to my good friend Mr Brown, our treasurer!

In recent days Gordon has been very friendly and co-operative (not that he hadn't been before!) and several times he has called in at the vicarage to ask to borrow some sugar, because, as he explained, his projections of sugar consumption in the Brown household have proved to be based on a flawed predictive model, leaving him with a considerable shortfall in the supply-demand equation for his cup of tea! (Poor old Gordon, will he ever get anything right? Just my little joke!).

And, hey, let's get one thing straight right now. I'm well enough and tough enough to take the knocks. They come with the territory – the bigger the vicar, the bigger the knockers! Which brings me to Mrs Short! (No offence, Clare!) What can I say?

I'm afraid our church has a long history of over-zealous women (many of a certain age!) who claim to have seen things they haven't (documents, etc) and to have heard voices when they couldn't possibly have done so!

In medieval times, as you know, these women were called witches and were publicly burnt. Nowadays we don't do this any more, but who is to say that our solutions are any better than those of our ancestors?!

Perhaps next November 5th we could come up with someone to put on the fire who would be more relevant to the times we live in. Let's forget poor old Guy Fawkes and burn Mrs Short instead. I'm sure we could find some old clothes from the Oxfam Shop to make it look like Clare and have a big red balloon for her face. (No offence again, Clare!)

Let me explain – there are certain things that go on in the running of the parish that HAVE to remain confidential. Everybody knows that and Clare knows that or used to before she had her sad breakdown. So, obviously, I cannot answer her latest charges about eavesdropping and peeping toms in the PCC. As a vicar, I have taken a vow of silence on all these matters and I will not break it, not for anyone. And I know that you

The church with the vicar's new satellite listening dish!

By local artist Mr de la Nougerede

wouldn't want me to. If I started to speak I know you would stop me, shouting "Vicar, don't! You are bound by your vow!" As it says in the *Book of Ecclestonia*, "There is a time to keep silent and there is a time to keep even more silent" *(13.7)*.

So let's not go on about Mrs Short and her problems because it would be wrong to bring up the fact that I had to sack Mrs Short from the PCC when she resigned last year, after I had done my best to persuade her to stay on by telling her that she was indispensible!

Anyway, for those of you who are worried about what has happened to poor Mrs Short recently, I'm afraid she was forced to fall back on a job as a part-time teacher in a local secondary school, recently renamed the Colonel Gaddafi Technology College (formerly the Robert Mugabe Comprehensive).

And Mrs Short didn't do too well, by all accounts! And I'm sure you will all have heard about how she couldn't keep order, arrived late and bad-tempered in the mornings and blamed her "Shortcomings" (sorry Clare, couldn't resist it!) on "problems with her hairdryer"!

Some unkind colleagues thought she looked as though she might have been drinking, reminding them of Mrs Mowlam!

It would be quite wrong for me to comment on this sort of malicious speculation! But if you asked me "Vicar, hand on heart, do you think Clare's been at the bottle?", I'd have to say "Hey, yes, it looks like it, doesn't it?" The lack of judgement, the general incompetence, the suggestions that I should resign – it all adds up, doesn't it?

Still, as I said, I don't want to go on about Mrs Short! I certainly don't have the space to make any comment on the similarity between her behaviour and that of Judas Iscariot, who received "thirty pieces of silver" as an "advance" for his book betraying his leader!

On the same theme, I don't have any space to talk about Mr Cook (who has a beard like Judas Iscariot!) who is also writing a book about me. I gather some people are saying that he needs the money to pay off his racing debts, since he has become a compulsive gambler, with a tendency to back horses which have no chance of winning (e.g. "Gay Gordon" at 500-1 in the St Albion's Handicap!)

Anyway, that's quite enough of things I haven't got space for!

All that really matters is that I am very much still here, and will remain

yours for ever and ever,

Amen!

Tony

Kiddiez Korner!

Mums, have your kids had their MMR jab yet? Don't delay or you could find yourself being arrested! Don't pay any attention to our crazy local GP Dr Wakefield, who is now totally discredited and has been found to be in the pay of several local parents with ill children.

Cherie Booth QC writes: Can people stop asking whether Baby Leo has had the MMR jab. It's nobody's business what jabs a baby does or does not have in the privacy of the vicarage, and I warn anyone who continues to ask this question that they will be deemed to be in breach of Article 51 of the Human Rights Act which guarantees the right to privacy of all famous people and their children, on pain of extradition to Mr Blunkett's new Legal Holding Centre in Tanzania.

Parish Postbag

Dear Sir,

I am getting more and more worried about the vicar's health. Frankly, he looks terrible, tired and old. May I suggest that he has a face-lift and he will soon find

Yours sincerely
Sir Clifford Richard,
Sandy Shore, Barbados.
(via e-mail)

The Editor reserves the right to cut all letters thinking that the vicar is at the point of death even when they are from such a distinguished parishioner as Sir Clifford of Richard, Knight Bachelor Boy and Living Doll (surely legend?). D.H.

☆ HOT TICKETS!!! ☆

Mr Campbell's touring one-man show (or 'one man in the audience show', as unkind critics have been calling it!) has had its name changed from 'An Evening with Alastair Campbell' to 'An Evening with Ross Kemp from TV's EastEnders'. Don't miss this new 'sexed-up' version of the show everybody's talking about not going to see!
All tickets still available!
(Buy one, get 50 free!) P.M.

That Goldsmith Legal Advice In Full

TOP SECRET – PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL

I, the Attorney General, Baron Goldsmith of Lincolns Inn, by the power invested in me by Her Majesty the Queen and her chief minister, being requested to pronounce on the legality or otherwise of the forthcoming war against Iraq, hereby do solemnly and verily give the following judgement:

1. It looks a bit dodgy legally to be honest.

2. But Alastair's dossier is jolly frightening, isn't it? Especially the 45 minutes bit.

3. Go for it! Bombs away!

Signed and sealed

Baron Goldsmith of Baghdad

PS. Will this do?

FAGIN DEMANDS APOLOGY

by Our Apology Staff **Art Fuldodger**

MR Oliver Fagin, the well-known director of a youth employment programme in London's inner-city, is seeking an apology from the Labour Party after he was compared in an official speech to the notorious Conservative villain Letwin.

Letwin famously takes money out of the pockets of the poor and gives it to his rich friends and Mr Fagin was furious at the "odious comparison".

Oliver New Twist

Last night Mr Fagin said, "This is pure anti-Faginism and the Labour Party must make a public apology at once."

In The Salerooms

Who Are They – The Bidders For The World's Most Priceless Newspaper?

THE WORLD's most valuable newspaper is to come under the auctioneer's hammer following a ruling in the Delaware court. Bids are expected from the following collectors:

Mr Dirty Desmond, 48, who sees the Telegraph with its expansive coverage of Liz Hurley in her underwear as a fine addition to his collection of adult publications. He says, "I 'ave been an avid reader of the Daily Pornograph ever since I was a lad. They've got some fabulous birds there – Sarah Sands, Zoe Heller, Anne Robinson... we'll be seeing a lot more of them if I get the paper. Look out for the Ed-tit-orial and the Readers' Wives page!! Still, I'll have to sack the one with the beard and that old bloke – no one wants to see *them* with their kit off. Phwoar!!! Blimey!!

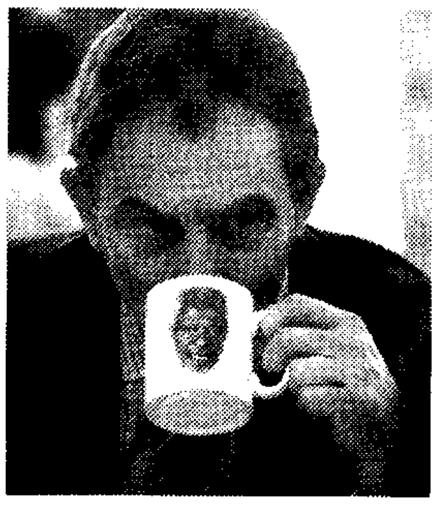
Lord Rothermere, 39, already owns a number of antique newspapers, including the Daily Mail. He says, "The Mailograph would be an excellent addition to my collection of right-wing publications. My family have been in this business for over a hundred years. I think you'll find that the Mailograph will be in safe hands. And I can assure people that if anyone else buys the paper then house prices will undoubtedly collapse, leaving the entire middle classes penniless and probably dying of SARS."

The Barclay Brothers, 79, thought they had already bought the Daily Telegraph, but their dealer turned out to be a charlatan called Lord Black. Said a spokesman for the brothers, Mr Andrew Neill, speaking from the Channel Island of Brillu, "We were assured that we had the deal in the bag, but sadly the judge rumbled us, so we'll have to bid, along with everyone else."

Taki, 79, millionaire ex-convict, cokehead and columnist. He says, "Ownership of the Daily Takigraph is something that every poor little Greek boy in the Big Onion would like to get his hands on, as well as Lady Black, who is one helluva foxy *(cont. p. 94 of the Spectator)*

Advertisement

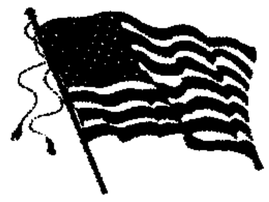
INSTANT KOFI!



Says long-time consumer T. Blair, "Mmm!! This keeps me awake at night!"

Are you fed up with waiting around for your Kofi? Now, thanks to MI6, you can have Instant Kofi on your desk within minutes!

All the exotic taste of the United Nations Of The World in a steaming hot bug of Kofi! *(Surely 'Mug', mmm!!! Ed.)*



Letter From America

by Alistair Cook

Cook: Good morning, yesterday was Super Bull Tuesday, the day when, as you know, the American primary season reaches its climax. The triumph of Senator Kerry in New Dworkin took me back to a balmy autumn day in 1932 and a golf course where I was playing a round with Senator Dewey, Governor Lewey and Judge Hewey. As I was preparing to drive off the seventh green, I spotted a lonely figure walking down the fairway looking for his ball in the large sand bunker for which that course is justly notorious. "Do you know who that is?" I asked my companions. "Why, that is our Uncle Donald," they quacked. As Bing Crosby once said to me, "Do you think I should give up now?" *(Continued for what seems like two hours)*

Announcer: And now, on the Archers, there's trouble down at the Old Fist And Gerbil as hundreds of Gay Rights Activists descend on Walter Gabriel's cottage for an all-day *(That's enough Radio Four. Ed.)*

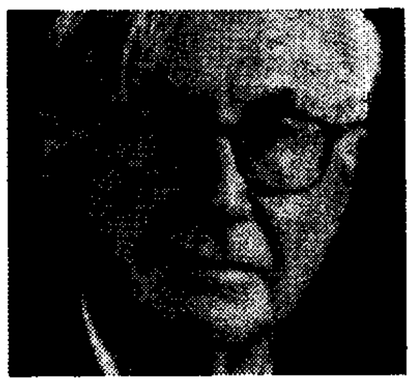
Trouble In Voodoo Island Where They Filmed 'Live And Let Die'

by Our Tabloid Staff
Henry Porter-Prince

SOMETHING happened yesterday in Haiti, the island famous for the bit in the film where Roger Moore *(cont. p. 94)*

"We're using community-based punishment as an alternative to imprisonment"

Why My Cousin Will Be The Next President Of The United States



William Rees-Mogg

I WAS not at all surprised to discover that the man who is shortly to become the most powerful man in the world is closely related to me. Senator Kerry, whom many believe will soon be the President of the United States, is my 40th cousin, 27 times removed.

We share a common ancestor in Obadiah Twit, who was leader of the Puritan sect, the Loony Brethren, who fled to America in the early 17th century in the mistaken belief that Europe was about to be engulfed in a return of the Ice Age.

Twit established a colony on the banks of the Moggahogga River, but met an untimely end when a local Indian tribe, the Starbucks, grew impatient of his sermons, many of them lasting several days, and slaughtered Twit and all his followers in what went down in history as "The Loonies' Last Stand" (subsequently used as the basis of the 1956 John Wayne classic *Massacre At Mogg Creek*).

When my cousin enters the White House, which given our shared ancestry must now seem inevitable, I look forward to inviting him over to the Garrick for luncheon, so that he can benefit from my advice on the conduct of world affairs, and possibly even to make the acquaintance of my son Jacob Really-Smugg, his 40th cousin 28 times removed, who, had it not been for a quirk of history, might well himself now be the President of the United States, rather than having been cruelly rejected by the inverted snobbery of the Kensington and Chelsea Conservative Association, who seem to believe that we Really-Smuggs are stuck-up snobs obsessed with our ancestry and our role in history, when in fact we are (*cont'd p.94*)

Is This Britain's Lost Leader?

by Our Archaeological Staff
DOUGIE TUPP

WHAT WAS hailed as perhaps the most astonishing archaeological discovery of the millennium was made yesterday in a back garden in Chingford, Essex – a coin bearing the image of a man who until now historians have believed never existed.

He is Duncansmithonius, a figure from the pre-Dark Ages, who according to legend was briefly the leader of a small tribe centred on Southern England known as the Torii.

In former and happier times, the Torii had been feared when they were led by their warrior queen Thatchicaa.

But they then disappeared from history, with only a few slighting references to later chieftains such as Majoricus.

Duncoin-Smith

According to the most revered of contemporary historians, The Venerable Deedes, who was long believed by his followers to be immortal: "And there was no figure in the land held in greater scorn than Duncansmithonius, proclaimed by himself to be the Dux Silentius, or 'quiet leader', but universally ridiculed as 'Coughus Absurdicus'."

Hidden Talents

Now Deedes's seemingly fanciful account has, astonishingly, been confirmed by the unearthing of a tiny rust-covered coin in the garden of 253 Tebbit Crescent, Chingford.

Said a man with a beard from the British Museum: "Am I going to be on television? I must ring my wife and let her know... this is an extraordinary find which changes our whole view of early 21st Century Britain.

"Until now we have always assumed that the whole country lived peacefully and happily under the wise rule of the Emperor Antoninus Blairus. But we now realise, thanks to this coin, that he had not quashed all the opposition, and that for a short time a tiny band of rebels survived in the marshlands of what is now North-East London, and *(cont. 94AD)*

"See. My Dad is bigger than your Dad!"

MATHS CRISIS ROCKS GOVERNMENT

by Our Education Staff **G.C.S.E Reetayke**

TEACHERS today warned of a growing crisis in the higher levels of government as more and more politicians were "unable to do the basic arithmetic".

One teacher said, "There is a terrible shortage of numerate politicians and this has created a situation of declining standards in dealing with figures."

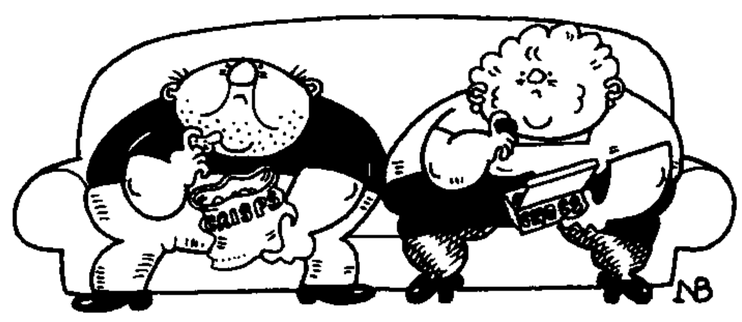
He continued, "We have reached a stage where the Education Secretary cannot equate a shortage of mathematics graduates with a £30,000 student debt at the end of three years."

Other mathematical howlers cited by teachers included some ministers who thought that *lowering* the pass mark in exams would *increase* educational standards and others who thought that doubling the number of exams every year would reduce the pressure on students.

The teacher concluded: "These are really elementary errors that one doesn't expect to see at this level but politics is so easy to get into nowadays that one shouldn't be surprised."

A government spokesman denied there was a problem. He said, "The suggestion that senior government ministers cannot handle figures is completely half-baked or half completely baked or possibly ⅔ baked over a third of the period, I'll have to get back to you on that."

MODERN NURSERY RHYMES



Jack Sprat eats lots of fat,
His wife eats lots of sweeties.
He has had a coronary,
She has diabetes.

'SAME SEX MARRIAGE DOESN'T WORK' SAYS BUSH

by Our Man In Washington **Mary Whitehouse**

PRESIDENT Bush today lashed out at "unhealthy partnerships between men of the same sex", and pledged that he would ban any further attempts to formalise such "marriages" in the future.

"I myself", he said, "am guilty of forming such a special relationship with an English public schoolboy I met a few years back, but I can tell you, it all turned out badly.

Weapon of Ass Destruction

"It's all very well getting into bed with these guys, but when they want to kiss your ass and talk about sharing your toothpaste, it is time to draw the line."

It is believed that President Bush formed an unnaturally close friendship with a young British admirer, Tony Blair, 24, and that the two of them were on the phone to each other every day.

Blair told friends at the time that he would "go anywhere and do anything just to be with George", and he made several visits to Bush's Texan hideaway.

But later the relationship cooled, particularly when Blair began hanging around with a handsome German "friend" Gerhard, and his older French partner Jacques.

Donald Bumsfelt

The President added, "Some people feel that these relationships are blessed by God, but I can tell you that, in my experience, these so-called marriages never work out."

A spokesman for Mr Blair said that he was unavailable for comment because he was "too busy working on his plan to introduce top-up congestion changes for fat people."

Tony Blair is 19.

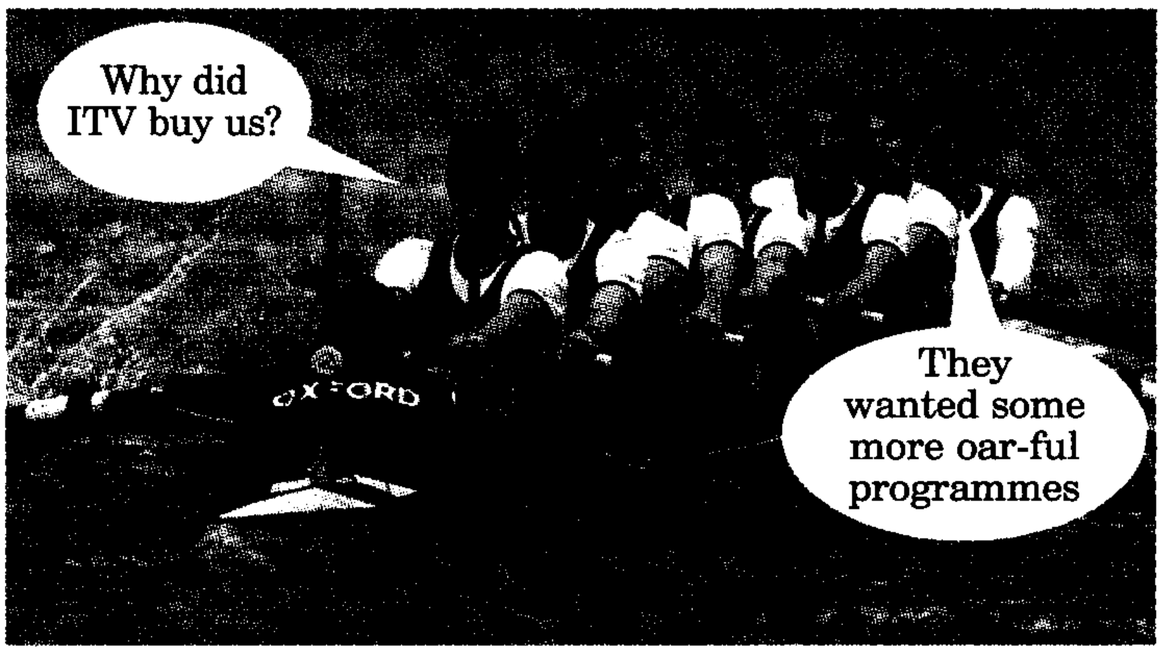
THAT BOAT RACE IN FULL

(Man standing by bridge at Putney)

The late John Snagge *(for it is he)*: And here I am on the towpath for this historic contest between these two venerable institutions with their long tradition of sporting rivalry. Who will win the Boat Race this year? Will it be the BBC in the dark blue suits or will it be ITV in the pale blue shellsuits sponsored by Beefeaters Gin. The ITV crew have a slight advantage in that they are carrying more money, but the BBC crew have history on their side with an unbroken record of 50 straight Boat Race wins...and they're off...

(We see two groups of television executives throwing suitcases of cash at some students in boats)

...ITV are starting off at an astonishing rate... that must be 36...37 thousand pounds a minute and goodness me the BBC are sinking... they're flailing around... they don't know what to do... they've been sold down the river... and ITV are now a good million pounds ahead and... yes it's all over... the BBC are throwing their cox, Peter Salmon, into the river... well, what a tremendous race that was with a dramatic surprise result... that's certainly one in the eye for those who say the Boat Race is very boring *(cont. for 94 years)*



Sports Columnist of the Year 2004!

SALLY JOCKSTRAP
The Voice Of Sport

MANCHESTER United are in crisis. Why? It's obvious. Rock of Gibraltar isn't up to the job of managing this Premier English Rugby Team. My tip for the Six Nations Championship? – Tim Henman. And will this be the year when Rio Ferdinand drives his McLaren over the winning post at Henley? Not if Dwain Chambers has anything to say about it. *(You're fired. Ed.)*

A BUSY LADY: Gaby Roslin

Daily Record

the PREMIERSH*TS
PAUL WOOLEY
MODERN RUSSIAN CLASSICS: 'A DAY IN THE LIFE OF ROMAN ABRAMOVICH'
£1M-
£2M-
£3M-
DAMN, CAN'T SLEEP, ALL THOSE MILLIONS SPENT AND STILL NO SILVERWARE
THE MISERY ALL I WANT IS JUST ONE TROPHY!
IF I CAN MAKE A SUGGESTION SIR
RANIERI

APPALLING NEW ALLEGATION

The DAILY GLOVE

Edited by Stephen Glover £3.70

New Newspaper To Close

by Our Entire Staff
STEPHEN GLOVER

A NEW newspaper venture, launched by the former editor of the Sunday Independent, Mr Stephen Glover, is to close even before it is launched, the Daily Glove has learned.

The Daily Glove was aiming at an up-market, informed readership who are looking for serious news and comment on the serious issues of the day written by serious journalists in a serious manner.

However, the serious money required for this project has proved seriously unavailable.

NOT ON OTHER PAGES

Francis Wheen on "Why Oh Why You Should Buy My New Book".

Lines Written On The Return Of Sir Malcolm Rifkind To The Centre Of The British Political Stage

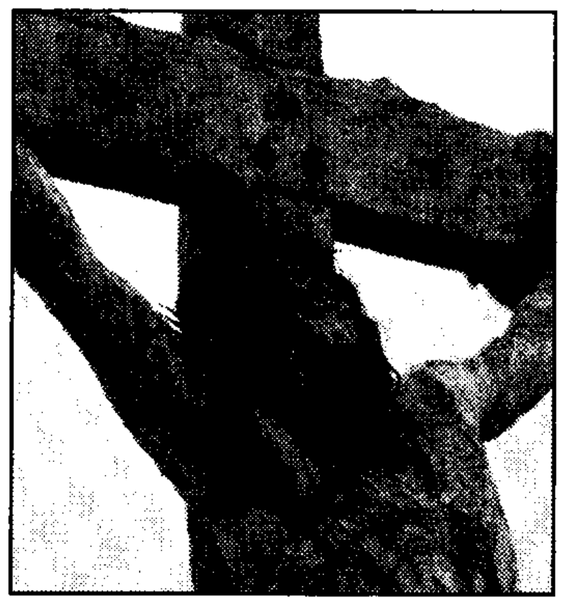
BY WILLIAM REES-MCGONAGALL

'Twas in the Year of Our Lord two thousand and four
That Sir Malcolm Rifkind's name was heard abroad in the land once more.
After many years of going through a barren patch
Following the spotting of his talents by Mrs Thatch,
Sir Malcolm had finally found a vacancy to fill – Oh!
His joy at being chosen to fight the seat formerly held by Michael Portillo *(Cont. p. 94)*

New Exhibition Opens

GREY POWER
WHO DO YOU THINK YOU'RE KIDDING MR PRESCOTT♫
WE CAN'T AFFORD TO LIVE!
UNFAIR
BLAIR IS A CHEAT
SPEAK UP!
CAN'T HEAR!
LOUDER!
WE MUST MAN THE BARRICADES, BROTHERS!
HOOT IF YOU SUPPORT US
SUNSET HOME
HONK! HONK!
THIS PROTEST WE'RE GOING ON, WILL THERE BE ENOUGH TOILETS EN ROUTE?
TAKE THE MAGAZINE IN YOUR RIGHT HAND AND SWEAR BY ALMIGHTY GOD....
The Oldie
WAS HITLER GAY?
AS A PROTEST, HE'S NOT GOING TO WATCH THE HISTORY CHANNEL
HOW TO MAKE A HOMEMADE BOMB
MIX ONE BETA BLOCKER WITH SOLUBLE ASPIRIN, ADD A DIURETIC...
NO MORE COUNC
CASP!
HEATH

'PASSION' OPENS TO STORM OF PROTEST

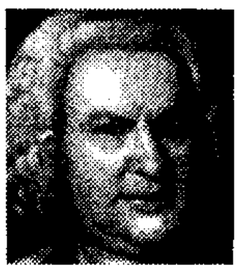


by Our Showbiz Staff **Bach Bamigboye** and **Johannes Ross**

A NEW version of the last days in the life of Christ has sparked a wave of controversy after its first performance in Leipzig last night.

B-Minor Mass Hysteria

The Passion, based on the gospel according to St Matthew, is filled with scenes of violence, and dwells at length on the blood-soaked last hours of Jesus, before he is brutally nailed to the cross.



Mel Gibson

Many of the audience left the church where the new work was premiered in tears, deeply moved by the horrendous scenes they had just sat through.

Jewish groups, however, were furious at Herr Bach's "outrageous anti-Semitism" and his inclusion of the chorus "His Blood Be Upon Us" sung by a group clearly identified as including many Jews.

Bach was unrepentant and told waiting newsmen that he was merely repeating what was written in the Bible, his favourite book.

St Matthew Parris

Other critics were angered by the decision to present the entire oratorio in German, instead of the original Aramaic.

"There weren't even any surtitles," said one furious English visitor. "I couldn't understand a word of it. It'll never catch on."

NEW EUROPEAN AGREEMENT

"The keeper's had a quiet game"

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam "Spot", The First Dog

So. Farewell
Then Spot,
English Springer
Spaniel, loyal friend
And companion
To President George W.
Bush
For fifteen
Years.

Keith says
You were nearly as
Faithful
As the English poodle
Blair.

I had to point
Out to him that
Poodles are
French –
Which spoiled
His joke.

My joke was that
Bush and Blair were
The dogs of war.

But Keith did
Not find this
Funny
As he considers the
War is a serious
Matter.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

SPRING COMPETITION
Spot the dog

Late Education News

THE GOVERNMENT has announced that drugs tests in schools for nine and twelve-year-olds are to be scrapped in favour of a more broad-based European-style baccalaureate system.

Forty percent of their marks will now be assessed on their practical skills, including chasing the dragon and dealing speed at the school gate, while the remaining 60% will come from marking their Rizla™ exam papers.

The Education Secretary Tony Blair said this would be the only way to stop our children falling behind their European counterparts in their drug education.

Advertisement

On the occasion of her 18th drink, Gnome-Tel proudly presents **Charlotte** 'Voice of an Angel' **Church** in a sensational new collection of classical tracks.

★ **Queen of the Nightclubs** *(from Mozart's* The Magic Champagne Flute*)* ★ **Ave Tia Maria** *Johann Sebastian Bacardi* ★ **Pie (Eyed) Jesu** *from Faure's* Wreckedquiem ★ **Zadok The Pissed** *George Freedrink Handel* ★ **Your Tiny Vodka Is Frozen (Che Gelida Breeza)** *Pukini (That's enough. Ed.)*

HUGE JOY AS GCHQ WHISTLEBLOWER CLEARED

by Our Entire Staff

THERE was delight and relief in broadsheet newspapers across the country last night at the announcement that Mrs Katharine Gun was to walk free from the Old Bailey after charges of breaking the Official Secrets Act were dropped.

"This is a great day for freedom of speech," said one editor, "but it is an even greater day for newspapers, since it means we can put a fruity blonde on the front page."

Said a supporter of Mrs Gun, "She did the right thing. She wore a nice suit and had her hair done. She also smiled a lot which is very important."

Wolfwhistleblower

But for the Security Services there were vital questions left to be answered.

"Are there any other fruity blondes at GCHQ who would like to appear on the front page of the broadsheets?"

Mrs Gun

ON OTHER PAGES

■ Pictures of boring men in suits who would have been on the front page if it hadn't been for the fruity blonde.

A Doctor Writes

Fibulation

AS a doctor I am often asked, "What is wrong with the Prime Minister?"

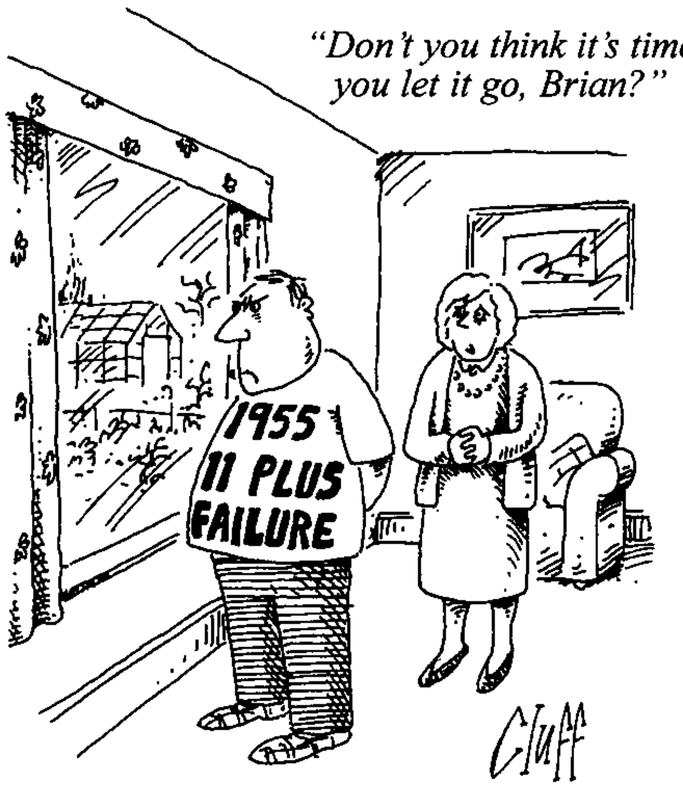
The simple answer is that Mr Blair is suffering from a routine condition amongst Prime Ministers – namely Fibulation or *Mendacious normalis bliarensis* to give it the full medical name.

What happens is that after a long period in office the Prime Minister begins to notice murmurs which may become more frequent and more pronounced as time goes on.

This gives rise to what is known as Fibulation or the compulsive telling of fibs. These may include lies on subjects as diverse as buying property in Bristol, or declaring war on Iraq or denying that there is anything wrong with him.

If you are worried about the Prime Minister there is nothing you can do about it.

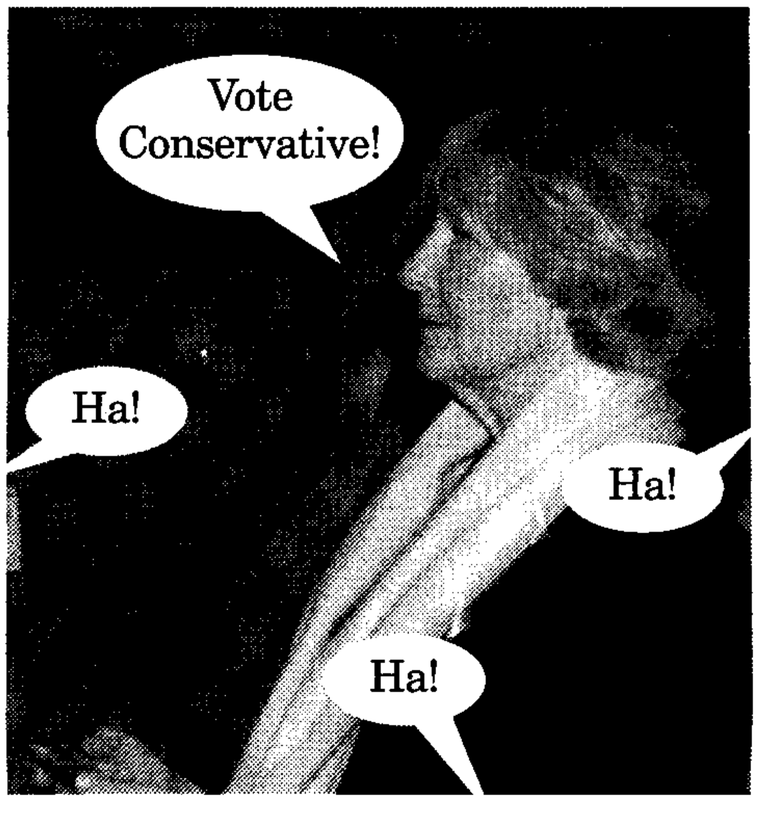
© *A Doctor.*



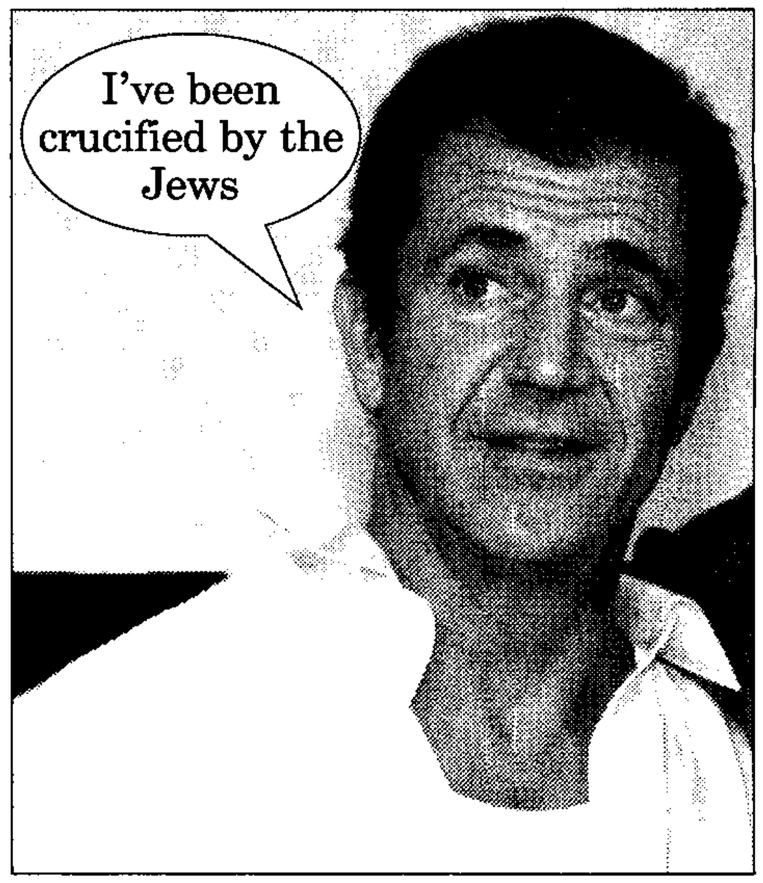
That Hilarious Ann Winterton Joke in Full

"Well there were these two Chinese men, no that's wrong, there were these two fish or were they sharks? Yes that's it, they were sharks and they were very hungry so one of them said to the other one 'I could murder an Indian', so they swam up to... was it Bradford? ...no I know, it wasn't an Indian at all, it was a Chinese meal they wanted so they went to that place where all the Chinese people died and one of the sharks said, 'Is this Eric Morcambe?' or perhaps that's what the other one said, anyway, they ended up eating cockles... oh dear, I think I've given away the punchline..."

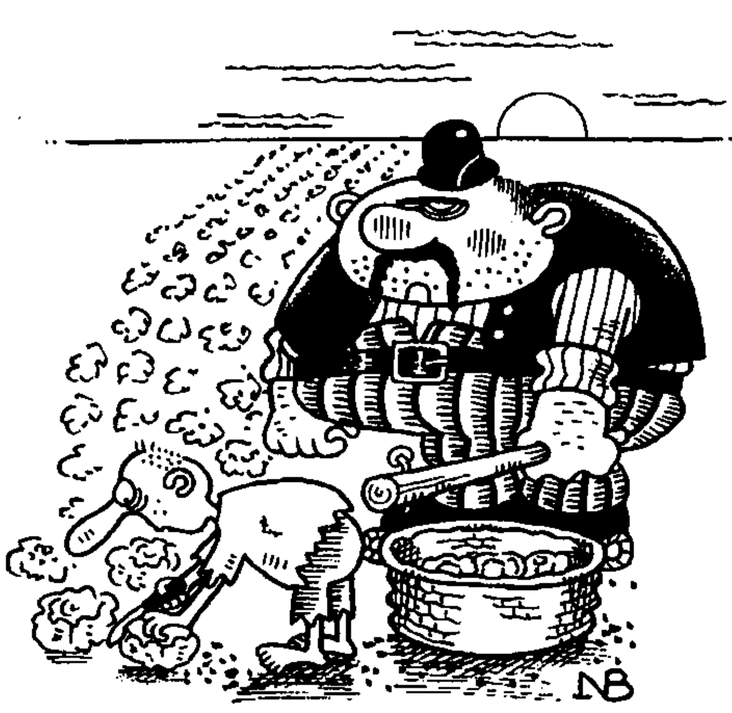
Ann Winterton's Next Joke



GIBSON DENIES ANTI-SEMITISM



MODERN NURSERY RHYMES



See-saw, Margery Daw,
Janik shall have a gangmaster.

He shall have but a penny a day
Because the gangmaster's a bastard.

DIARY

CLARE SHORT

Okay, it may be this great big heart of mine getting the better of me (again!!) but I've decided to give a dinner-party tonight. Not some snooty, stuck-up sort of occasion, all clean knives and forks and suchlike. That's not me. No way. That's not the Clare Short we all know and love.

I'll be brutally honest because that's my way. I prefer the more friendly, warm-hearted approach. Bean-bags, paper-cups, lovely big pot of chilli-con-carne, boil-in-the-bag rice, use-your-fingers, bring-a-bottle, the lot.

Frankly, you don't have to go all lah-di-dah to enjoy yourself. Sadly, not many people in government realise that. They've been corrupted, and it's a tragedy.

Regrettably – and I say this with a great deal of sadness in my heart – Tony was never any good at giving dinner-parties. In my position as Secretary of State for International Development, I would often be invited to official do's at Downing Street. Tony loves a VIP, you see, particularly one who's, let's be frank, a much-loved household name – and not one to keep her mouth shut!!

So, for what it's worth, I often dined at Number 10 with my opposite numbers like Jacques (Chirac) and Bill (Clinton). But – and I'm sorry but I have to say this – I generally found the experience deeply disappointing. In retrospect, it was highly regrettable that Tony would always insist on the whole "dining-room-table-and-chairs" routine when we could just as easily have enjoyed something on our laps. And let's not forget about the poor forgotten Downing Street kitchen staff, shall we? Going through the whole "posh banquet" business meant a crippling amount of extra work for them, when they could of been home having quality time with their partners and kids, if any. Kids are our future, you know.

So I go down the local co-op early to do my own shopping. It's not open. I feel very let down. I think, this is silly, something must be done. So I knock on the door with my fist, telling them to let me in. Eventually, some sort of official in a grey suit and tie, blah, blah, comes to the door. "Sorry, madam, we're not open for ten minutes," he tells me, on his high horse.

Frankly, I feel uncomfortable with that. When there's shopping to be done, I want to get down to it right here, right now. That's why I'm known as a woman of tremendous passion and spirit. My trouble is, I've got this great big heart – and I don't care who knows it! I'm not one for red tape – and I tell him so.

Typical! The man in the grey suit starts blabbing his mouth off about rules and regulations, blah blah blah, and he's afraid I'll have to wait. He obviously doesn't know what it's like to be a busy woman in the 21st century who cares passionately about feeding other people. A favourite quotation from Voltaire springs to mind: it's dangerous to be right when those in power are wrong. He could have coined it just for me, bless him. I've been in similar situations before. In my judgement, this one could turn very unpleasant, very unpleasant indeed. So I do my level best to calm it down, to bring much-needed logic and a little touch of human warmth and understanding to the proceedings. "I suppose you'd tell a starving baby in Africa it'd have to wait, would you?" I say, forcefully. I'm very sorry, but deliberate cruelty like that really does make my blood boil.

Eight-thirty, and at long last the supermarket door opens, thank you very much.

I'm the first one in, they can't stop me, it's not only my right it's my duty, and I'm still a power to be reckoned with, I'm sorry but I am. I've not been shopping five minutes when a little old lady recognises me, bless her, and asks me the way to the cheese counter. In doing so, she offers me widespread support for my hard-won ideals and fiercely-held beliefs. "Regrettably," I explain, "and with the greatest respect and affection, we've all got to say to Tony, thank you very much for what you've achieved, but the time has now regrettably come when we must seek to renew the honour and integrity of our country and regrettably this means you must resign. Leaving the way open for someone who cares passionately about our core beliefs."

The little old lady stares back, her mouth wide open in admiration. I've made her day. "Tell you what, love," I say, kindly. "Here's my shopping list. Work your way through it. You can only do your best. Regrettably, I don't have anyone else to do it for me. I've always believe in trusting others. And now I'm trusting you. Help me out, guys. Don't let me down, whatever you do. I'll meet you by the check-out in ten minutes after I've enjoyed a well-earned breather."

Sadly, the little old lady – I'm not mentioning any names – didn't keep to her side of the bargain. We met ten minutes later, but she'd neglected to get the rice or the ketchup, even though we'd made an agreement.

Disappointed? Just a bit. Other people have an unfortunate tendency to neglect their duties to the wider community. She let herself down, she let me down, she let the whole country down. And the tragedy of it all? I could have done that shopping so much better myself.

The little old lady attempts to make amends by carrying my shopping home for me. Sadly, it's too little, too late. I'm not saying this as some kind of bitter attack on her, my friends will tell you that's not the kind of person I am, but what I am saying is that, with the greatest respect, she must accept a fair measure of the blame. I tried to help her, but my generosity rebounded on me. Oh, well. You live and learn.

Inside my home, I take a deep sigh for humanity and then start the cooking. Regrettably, Tony never did his own cooking. He left it to others. Some say it was an abuse of power. Personally, I think he deceived himself that he was cooking when it was clear to the rest of us that he wasn't. But that's between him and his conscience. It's him who'll have to live with it.

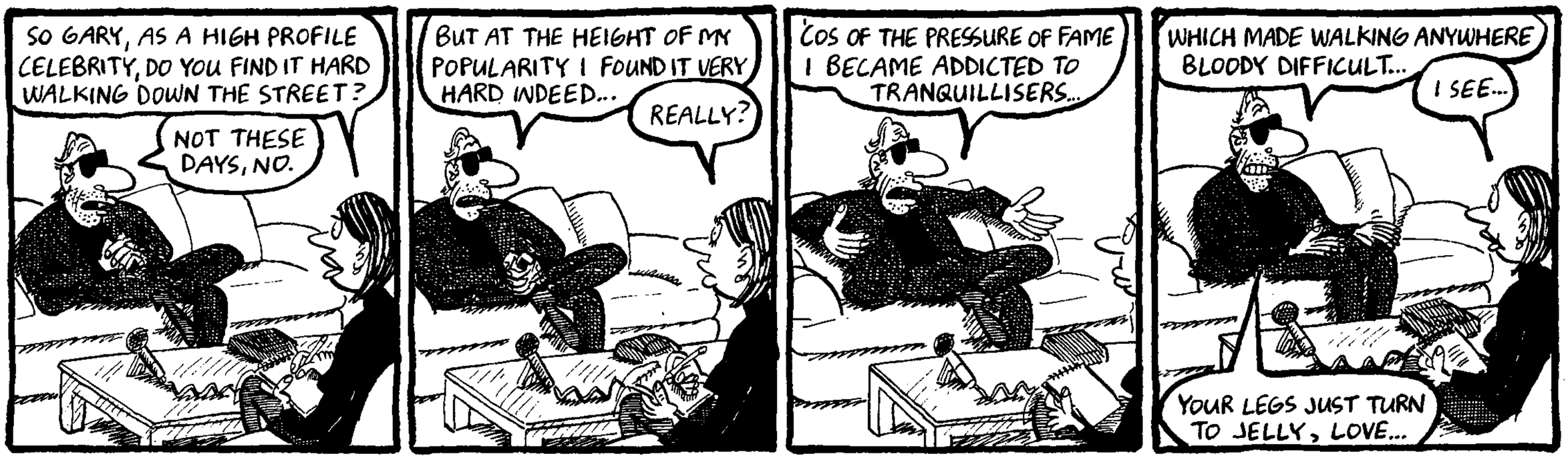
The chilli's cooked by mid-day, eight hours before it's due. I'm hungry, so start eating it. Before I know it, I've finished the lot. It's a set-up. I blame our whole food store system, for allowing the shops to open so early that ordinary decent people are obliged to buy meat and veg way before we need to eat it. The tragedy of it all is that when my guests come to dinner, there'll be nothing for them to eat. I feel uncomfortable with this, of course I do. But I have wrestled long and hard with my conscience, and I would do the same again. It is hard for me to say this, but, regrettably, my guests have only got themselves to blame.

As told to

CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


SO GARY, AS A HIGH PROFILE CELEBRITY, DO YOU FIND IT HARD WALKING DOWN THE STREET?
NOT THESE DAYS, NO.
BUT AT THE HEIGHT OF MY POPULARITY I FOUND IT VERY HARD INDEED...
REALLY?
'COS OF THE PRESSURE OF FAME I BECAME ADDICTED TO TRANQUILLISERS...
WHICH MADE WALKING ANYWHERE BLOODY DIFFICULT...
I SEE...
YOUR LEGS JUST TURN TO JELLY, LOVE...

★ Literary Review: Stars and Tripe Special ★

What's the story?

Old School Tobias Wolff
(Bloomsbury, £12.99)
Oracle Night Paul Auster
(Faber, £15.99)

The writer who writes about a writer writing often seems to do so out of a sense of desperation, stuck for ideas. You feel he should get out more. A stroll down to the stationery shop (one of the high points of Auster's latest) is not enough. All that stuff about staring at the empty page, the blank notebook, the silent typewriter, the great idea for a story that somehow just doesn't work out... *Get on with it*, you want to shout, *get on with the bloody story*. Except, of course, that there isn't one. The lack of story is the story.

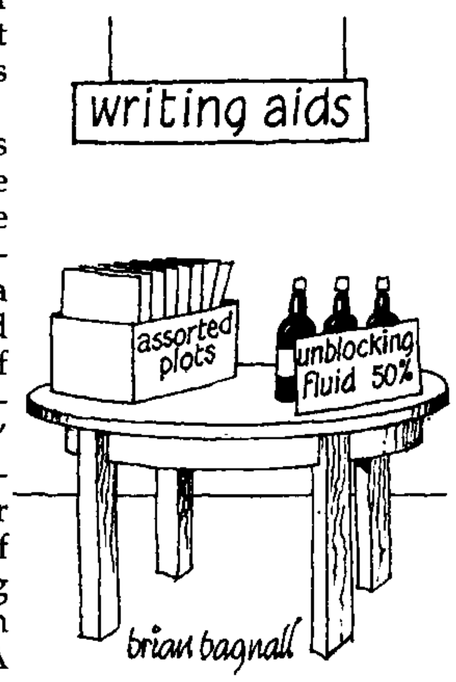
Tobias Wolff was commissioned to write his first novel a couple of decades ago, apparently, so it's taken him a while. He's a respected short-story writer, of the formerly fashionable "dirty realist" school, who has managed to write at greater length in a couple of memoirs, including *This Boy's Life*, which was made into a film. A good autobiography isn't necessarily a work of the imagination; conversely, not all first novels are autobiographical. Wolff has admitted in interview that *Old School* is partly based on his own old school days. But what brings this novel particularly close to home, to its author's own desk in fact, is that it's all about writing.

It's set in the early 1960s and the school in question (private, boarding, exclusive) is a rather literary place. Famous writers are invited to visit and the boys compete for a private audience. Thus the scribbler of a prize poem gets to meet Robert Frost. A winning story gains another pupil the dubious honour of a date with Ayn Rand.

But the writer whose forthcoming visit really gets our competitive narrator's creative juices flowing is Ernest Hemingway. Except, unfortunately, that it doesn't. He's desperate to meet his hero but he cannot think up a story. As the deadline approaches, he gets ever more desperate.

On the eve of the deadline, he attends an editorial meeting of the school's literary magazine. Afterwards, leafing through some back issues of other journals, he finds a story which seems to say exactly what he wants to say. It's really his story, only someone else has already written it. The process of typing it out, changing names and places, is of course a painstaking one, lovingly described. He hands it in just in time. And of course it wins. Thus the writer writes about the writer writing in order to meet another writer.

Still, that's not as bad as Auster's latest fiction. Here we have a writer writing a story about a writer writing a story, based on a story suggested to him by another writer, who got the idea from a book by yet another writer, which contains within it another story by yet another writer being read by an editor with a view to publication.



Everyone of these writer's notebooks is itself the subject of another story, the one about the stationery shop (the tools of the trade lovingly described here) and its mysterious owner, who keeps disappearing and reappearing in the most unlikely way. Yet more stories and ideas for stories run off at tangents or get lost in the serious-looking (but quite unnecessary) footnotes.

What are all these stories doing here? Why are so few of them finished? The clever answer is that this is metafiction and the stories are not really stories at all, they're manifestations of the ideas which are the real subject of the book. Ideas about, er, missing people, missing ideas, missing endings. A more down-to-earth answer might be that the author has a bad case of writer's block, and the only way to avoid, er, "missing deadlines" is to cobble together a bunch of half-baked, half-borrowed, half-finished ideas into some sort of framing narrative and make it look like that was the whole point.

Plagiarism, writer's block, the potential of the unwritten masterpiece. It's all shop talk. Fascinating for your students on the creative writing course or your fellow delegates at the post-structuralism seminar. Fascinating for your fellow writers to write about when logs are rolled and backs are mutually patted. But for the common reader, for beach, bus or bedside, what does it offer?

The reviewer read through what he had written. He glanced at the clock as his deadline loomed and his fingers twitched above the recalcitrant keys of his coffee-stained laptop. How the hell to end it? That was the problem. Or was that, perhaps, the whole point?

Peck sniff

What We Lost Dale Peck
(Granta, £12)

TRENCHANT critics should always be wary of entering the literary trenches themselves. Until he was accused of having goosed Naomi Woolf, Professor Harold Bloom's biggest embarrassment was his only novel, which was rubbished and subsequently withdrawn from publication. James Walcott and James Wood, who had magisterially sneered at novelists from the pages of *Vanity Fair* and *The New Republic* respectively, likewise found their own first fictions comprehensively beaten with the yardsticks they had raised so severely against others.

The American writer Dale Peck is a more complicated example of these hypocrisies. He was an established novelist, whose talents for controversy and self-publicity were demonstrated by the fact that he called one of his stories *Fucking Martin*. In the past, this would have made the book unpublishable, but Peck understood that he was living in a culture in which, while some bookshops would refuse to stock the novel and certain newspapers decline to review it, enough of the others would highlight the controversy and bring attention to the product.

Last July, Peck wrote a review in *The New Republic* of *The Black Veil*, a family memoir by Rick Moody, an American author of Peck's generation whose work had achieved rather higher sales and received film attention (*The Ice Storm*.)

"Rick Moody is the worst writer of his generation," Peck began, going on to complain of "post-modernist drivel" and "pretentious, muddled, derivative, bathetic" prose. The only consolation for Moody was that the critic lined up against the wall alongside him almost every white male straight writer in America and Britain. Peck, a gay writer, was therefore open to the accusation of being ideologically selective in his hissy fit. And just in case any *Eye* reader is thinking that Peck may be right about all those pesky Americans, note his opinion of the work of Charles Dickens: "The worst writer to plague the English language."

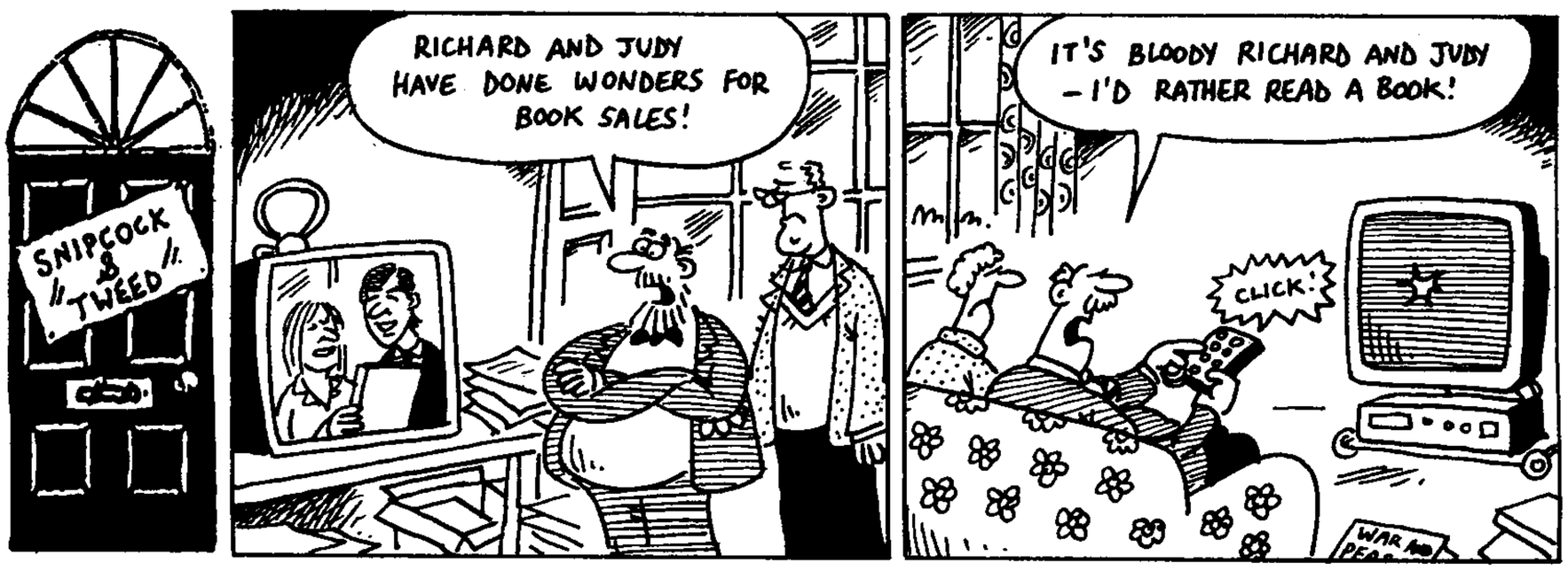
Well, there are certain basic rules of commonsense in life. One must be: don't publish your own family memoir only six months after you've accused a more successful writer of having cocked-up that same genre. Don't, especially, publish *What We Lost*. Sub-titled "A Story Of My Father's Childhood", the book purports to be the story of Dale Peck Jr, growing up poor in Long Island with his mother before being seized by his drunken, deadbeat dad and taken to a farm where he achieves a rough rural happiness with Uncle Wallace.

This is all pretty readable, although hardly original given the number of previous American authors who have ploughed this field. And its main distinction is that it's pretty clear that this is a fictional memoir: Peck is largely imagining what his father did and said. A fake memoir using novelistic techniques: what critical term might be found to describe that? How about "post-modernist drivel"?

As for the writing... here's the guy who despises the prose of almost every successful novelist in America, faced with the challenge of describing the fact that a room is a bit chilly: "As cold as an ice cube." Hey, way to go, Dale; so impressive how you steer round that dumb old cliche "cold as ice" by brilliantly realising that the shape of a room makes it more of an ice cube.

And here's Dale's dad, feeling kinda alone at home: "And so he lies on the empty bed, not to rest but to wait for his siblings to spill back into the house like a second helping of cereal." What a metaphor that is. There's simply no way an illiterate such as Charles Dickens or William Faulkner (another Peck hate-figure) would ever have realised that kids coming back into a house look like Cheerios being poured into a bowl.

Perhaps because they don't. Isn't there a phrase for that kind of writing? Oh, yes: "Pretentious, muddled, derivative, bathetic." Well, to be fair, not derivative because no other American writer has previously used an image quite so silly. Dale Peck is the worst memoirist of his generation.


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
RICHARD AND JUDY HAVE DONE WONDERS FOR BOOK SALES!
IT'S BLOODY RICHARD AND JUDY - I'D RATHER READ A BOOK!
CLICK!
WAR AND PEACE

"How dare you suggest I couldn't have written my autobog... my autobye... my book?!"

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, PART 94

Authors take sides on Iraq

(Cecil Woolf Publishing, £7.99)

Andrew Motion

The captains have departed
The sand with blood is flecked
The heroes take their medals
The poet collects his cheque

(*Will this do? A.M.*)

Beryl Bainbridge

I was against the attack on Iraq, you see, not because I have any idea what was going on there but because wars have been happening for simply ages and lots of people die in them, they do, though, and in any case I read in the papers that Saddam Hussein was about to be kidnapped by aliens, which would have meant that after his successors had all poisoned each other to death, which I believe happens a lot in the Middle East, President Bush and Mr Rumsfeld could simply have ridden into Baghdad on a camel and... [*continues*]

Harold Pinter

Listen chum? You want to start a bloody war, you come and ask me first, OK? *Then*, if it's against some bloody Fascist, and there's space for me in the *Observer*, *then* I might just let it go through, all right? As for this one, would you believe it, *I wasn't even bloody consulted*? Weapons of mass destruction? Bollocks. Liberation of the Iraqi people? Up my arse. The invasion demonstrated utter contempt for the opinions of internationally respected playwrights [*surely, "concept of international law"? – Ed*] and I'm *bloody cross* about it, I can tell you. Now where *is* that bloody driver of mine?

Sara Paretsky

I was against the American-led military action in Iraq. I did all in my power as a citizen to oppose this outrage, including publishing an angry letter in the *New Dworkin Bee* and mouthing the words "George Bush is a klutz" into my mirror every morning on waking as a gesture of solidarity with the Iraqi people. I also telephoned the White House to express my disapproval, though of course the bastards wouldn't put me through.

Paul Theroux

1. Look, I don't have a lot of time right now.
2. Not keen.

Alan Sillitoe

I thought the war in Iraq was a jolly good idea. Let me quote a poem by the great John Milton:

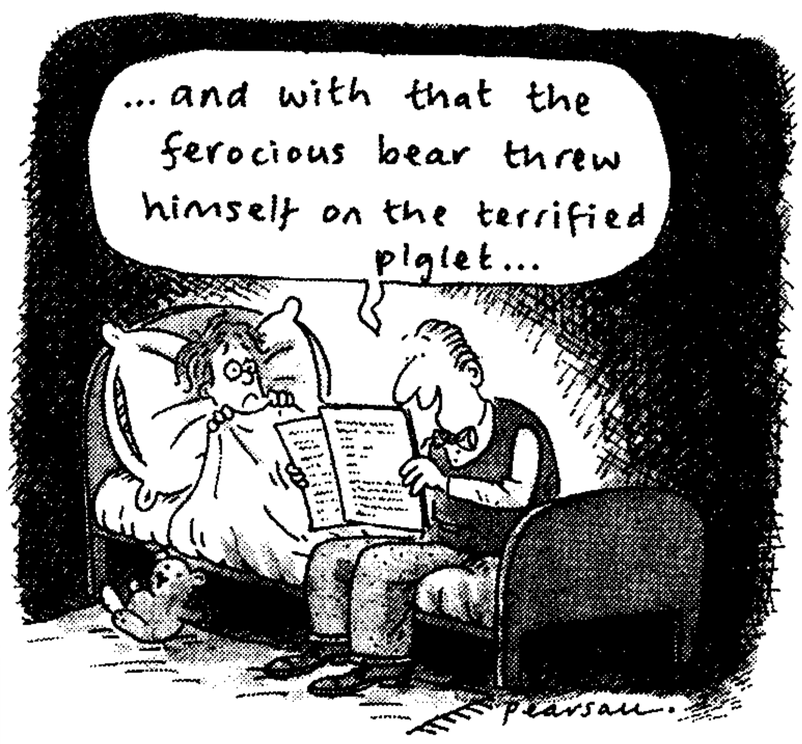
War's grievous sport is at an end,
The tyrant's knee doth meekly bend
Though millions flee and
thousands die
For weapons of mass destruction
care not I
As missiles hasten through the
tumid air
Thank God for Albion – and for
Tony Blair!

Who could put it better than that? One can only congratulate everyone involved.

David Hare

I was taken aback by the members of our literary community. Wherever you looked, there they were, in the *Guardian* whingeing on about President Bush, writing their pamphlets and their essays in the *London Review of Books*. Will they ever shut up? It seems unlikely.

FIRST DRAFTS



A.A. Milne

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Quiet is the new loud. Empathetic the new aggressive." – *Observer Music Monthly.*

"Scotland is the new Japan." – Glasgow *Herald.*

"Moroccan is the new Mexican." – *Irish Examiner.*

"Armani declares demure the new daring." – Jess Cartner-Morley, *Guardian.*

"To see mycoplasma genitalium as the new chlamydia is tempting." – *The Lancet.*

"4-3 has become the new 1-0." – *On the Ball*, ITV.

"Failure is the new success." – Quentin Willson, ITV.

"Wales are the new France." – *Observer.*

Warballs

"Britain's first licensed nude strip club, the Raymond Revue Bar, today collapsed into administration after nearly half a century of trading... 9/11, the economic downturn, Sars and avian flu have conspired to decimate takings." – *Evening Standard.*

"Wonderland Sydney, the Eastern Creek amusement park that has attracted millions of thrill-seekers for 19 years, will close its gates for the final time in April. Management says 11 September, the Bali bombings, the collapse of insurance giant HIH, the Sars virus and now the Asian bird flu 'have simply taken their toll'." – *Sydney Morning Herald.*

Pseuds Corner

I used to carry a copy of Ulysses with me everywhere just in case I was knocked down by a bus. It seemed more important than having clean underwear.

CRAIG RAINE
Guardian

The Scandinavian television station that was making a rare foray into the secondary strata of English football may not have enjoyed record-breaking audience figures, but the rain-shrouded post-industrial edifices that loomed behind Carrow Road's new South Stand, populated for the first time, will at least have lent the broadcast a bleak Bergmanesque beauty.

PAUL CONNOLLY reports on the Norwich-Sheffield United game
The Times

COED Hills is a community of woodland dwellers helping to bring a new presence to Earth by doing things as she requires things to be done. They are healing themselves and our beautiful planet simply by dropping our resistance to the Isness of what is now. Our Winter tasks are no chores at all, they involve building low impact housing, green woodwork, yurt making, woodland farming, permaculture and lots more. 'Performing the Art of Dwelling, Dwelling within the Art of Performance.' As the nature of what we're doing changes constantly, just visit whenever you feel like it or ring to give or receive a synchronistoc [sic] message.

Advertisement in Positive News, winter 2003

Commencing with what sound like planets bouncing like massive, slo-mo rubber spheres across the heavens, Hendrix makes some sort of indecipherable announcement in a Vocoderised, decelerated drone (actually a backwards recording of him saying, "OK, one more time"). This is the cue for the ejaculation of gallon after gallon of electric semen...[continues]

DAVID STUBBS reappraises Jimi Hendrix's 'Electric Ladyland', Uncut

What we were seeing, in that small clearing in the Australian jungle, was a microcosm of human social interaction and class war, unfolding before our eyes.

VAL HENNESSY on 'I'm A Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here', *Daily Mail*

Dr Carl Phelpstead (English and Cultural Criticism, Cardiff University)

'Size Matters: Penile Problems in Sagas of Icelanders'

Cardiff University Critical Theory Seminars, Spring 2004

Pseuds Corporate

Our Challenge:
Providing a neutral platform of discourse to capture, explore and integrate a systems view of things in order to unleash and bring together the creative potential of the dominant global institutions in an atmosphere of trust for steering our political, economical, scientific and cultural values and beliefs towards a greater sense of global social and ecological responsibility and thereby create new and positive outcomes for cross cultural problem and conflict resolution.

From the Lake Geneva Forum website

CONTRIBUTORS: Caroline Ewans (and several others), Simon Moore, J. James, Andrew Belsey, Tim Hardman, Julie Webb, Paul Wood.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

LOCKERBIE

THE SHOKRI TRUTH

ON Radio 4's *Today* programme on Tuesday 24 February, the prime minister of Libya, Shokri Ghanem, suddenly blurted out the truth about Lockerbie.

He said that the Libyan government did not believe that Abdulbasset Ali Megrahi was guilty as convicted of the Lockerbie bombing that killed 270 people in 1988, and explained that his government had only paid compensation to the relatives of the victims to "buy the peace". In other words, millions of pounds had been shelled out to the bereaved families simply in order to free Libya from US and UN sanctions – even though Libya had nothing to do with the bombings.

This has been made clear several times in the *Eye* over the years (notably in our special report, *Lockerbie: the Flight from Justice*, published in May 2001) but to hear it direct from the mouth of the Libyan prime minister caused consternation in high places, especially in the US. Libya's ruling council, the Jamahiriya, quickly backtracked, rejecting their own prime minister's statement as "inaccurate and regrettable". The US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, dismissed the whole affair as "a blip" and got back to the serious business of making friends and business partners of Gaddafi's henchmen.

On the BBC we heard of the outrage of the American victims' families, but very little notice was paid to the views of the much more sceptical British families, who put out a statement reiterating their long-standing call (consistently rejected by Tory and Labour governments alike) for a public inquiry to find out what really happened at Lockerbie.

POLICE RADIOS

17.6HZ health hazard?

ABSURDLY-NAMED telecomms firm mm02 Airwave continues to flout the law on controversial phone masts. It erected and switched one on in Birmingham last month despite the city council having refused planning permission.

A month earlier police bosses in Sussex distanced themselves from "illegal action" by the company, which is introducing the £2.5bn new Tetra (terrestrial trunked radio) system for Inspector Knacker up and down the land (*Eyes passim*). Airwave has already had to dismantle two masts, at Rogate and East Marden in West Sussex, after pre-empting planning decisions.

There are serious health concerns about the safety of radiation emissions from the Tetra system, both for officers using the handsets and people living near the masts. Tetra handsets pulse at a frequency (17.6HZ). The 2002 Stewart inquiry into mobile phones and health advised caution in relation to frequencies modulated at around 16Hz – the brain's own frequency. The Home Office says that the research which led to that conclusion has never been replicated and that Tetra is safe.

Other scientists disagree, including Dr Chris Busby, science secretary of the European committee on radiation risk. He has said: "We do believe that these things represent a hazard, not just in terms of mental effects, but in terms of cancer too." In forces which are already using Tetra, officers have reported headaches, nausea and sleep problems after using the system. No fewer than 173 officers reported such symptoms during trials in Lancashire in 2002.

ROUGH JUSTICE

Mooneyshine

DUDLEY HIGGINS was freed by the Court of Appeal from a five-year jail sentence for robbery (*Eye* 1092) after judges heard West Midlands police had suppressed evidence and altered a key document.

Higgins, a 32-year-old father of two, had never been in any kind of trouble before and he only won his appeal after the real robber approached him in jail and confessed.

The appeal judges were so concerned at the miscarriage of justice that they sent their judgement to the chief constable to ensure that "members of his force never conduct another trial in this way". They were particularly critical of WDC Patricia Mooney, who altered a key exhibit number to make it look as if it came from one robbery when it fact it came from another. Mooney also failed to disclose a key statement which would have exonerated Higgins. "It defies belief to suggest that she would not have realised the significance of the material that we consider was being suppressed," the judges said.

West Midlands police, however, have subsequently given Mooney but the lightest of taps on the wrist. Allegations that she perverted the course of justice were not pursued. At a closed police disciplinary hearing in December (which Higgins was not allowed to attend), the WDC admitted two very minor disciplinary charges relating to the performance of her duty and a failure to obey a lawful order – for which she has now received extra training and supervision.

Higgins's solicitor did secure a reluctant apology for the "distress" (five months in jail for a crime he did not commit, loss of job, etc) caused by the officer's "incompetence and inexperience". However, within weeks, even this minor stain on Mooney's career seems to have been wiped clean. She now works on enforcing the sex offenders register. When Higgins's solicitors, Hadgkiss, Hughes & Beale, raised concerns about her involvement in a separate case, they were told there was "no record of any disciplinary findings against her".

On the beat

CCTV has been widely introduced in city centres over the past decade to monitor violent and anti-social behaviour. It is unlikely that its proponents anticipated that such behaviour would sometimes be committed by the police, as in last week's widely-shown footage of Manchester police apparently beating up a suspect.

That was reminiscent of another hammering handed out by Knacker, and caught on camera, last year. Chris Wilson was kicked in the groin and punched after he had refused to let Wakefield police officers into his house – shortly after other officers had already searched for a friend who was not there.

PC Keith Empsall attacked Wilson, 28, as a neighbour across the road caught it all on video. Empsall, 42, was seen punching Wilson three times in the face, before pulling his hair and kneeing him. Wilson was thrown into the back of a van where he was beaten some more and carted off to a police station, detained and charged with being drunk and disorderly – charges that were, not surprisingly, never proceeded with. In September 2002 Empsall was convicted of common assault and sentenced to two months imprisonment. He was bailed pending an appeal. Last year at Leeds crown court, although his conviction was upheld, his sentence was reduced to 200 hours community service. Empsall, though dismissed from the police, did not serve even one day's imprisonment.

Meanwhile Wilson's civil claim against West Yorkshire police for wrongful arrest, false imprisonment and assault is expected to be settled in the next few weeks.

IMMIGRATION

The Go-Home Office

A COLOMBIAN graduate studying legally in England was "accidentally" deported the day after the Home Office assured his local MP that he could stay until the end of his course.

Javier Calderon, a 25-year-old electronic engineer, was on an English language course at Oaklands College, St Albans. He was arrested during a police raid on a restaurant where he was working part-time. Having gone over the 20 hours a week for which he had a work permit, he was held for two nights by police then taken to a detention centre near Heathrow.

At this point St Albans MP Kerry Pollard intervened to plead on Mr Calderon's behalf that deportation would be an over-reaction. On 4 February he was assured by Home Office minister Beverley Hughes that the student could stay, and she faxed Immigration to let them know.

Hughes explained in a letter to Pollard what happened next: "Unfortunately, the officer who had dealt with the case was no longer in the office and the officer who received it failed to read it properly and to take the necessary action to cancel the flight."

By the time the mistake was realised the next day, Mr Calderon was already airborne. Luckily, the flight had a stop-over in Madrid, where Immigration were able to catch up with him and fly him back to the UK – all at the taxpayers' expense.

Despite passing the buck onto Immigration officials, Hughes has apologised for the cock-up and says lessons will be learnt. One might be that relying on faxes isn't the best way to be sure that urgent matters are dealt with straight away.

WAR VETERANS

The mean machine

WOUNDED war veterans who have to travel to hospital for the medical examinations required so that they can claim disablement benefits, have had more than two-thirds of their petrol money snatched.

The MoD's Blackpool-based Veterans Agency is signed up to a deal with private health providers Schlumberger Medical Services, who provide doctors for medical assessments in benefits cases, mostly for the Department of Work and Pensions.

Former servicemen and women who were injured during wartime (as well as civilians and merchant sailors injured by enemy action during the Second World War) must attend assessments when making their claim for financial assistance. Prior to the Schlumberger deal, car mileage rates of 22.5p were paid to help with the journey. Now that has been slashed to just 6.5p despite the fact that veterans in some country districts live more than 50 miles from an examination centre.

"The Veterans Agency is a signatory to the contract with Sema [now Schlumberger] and is therefore obliged to accept the reimbursement fee of 6.5p a mile," explained Peter Hulme, the agency's head of operations. "It is not meant to be a contribution towards the general running costs of car ownership which would be incurred in any event and irrespective of the journey to the medical examination."

PS: The MoD's pay and personnel agency is currently paying out 40p a mile to civilian staff in motoring expenses. But then they probably have bigger, more expensive cars to run than most disabled oldies.

MMR

INTERESTING CONFLICTS...

THE vilification of Dr Andrew Wakefield in recent days has been a side show to the important issue of whether the mumps, measles and rubella triple vaccine (MMR) poses a risk to a small sub set of children. But the attacks have served a purpose. They have highlighted the need to preserve independent medical research – and reminded the public that there is one rule for an off-message messenger like Dr Wakefield and quite another for the government and drug companies.

For example, one leading health official responsible for immunisation has been working as an expert for the three defendant drug companies in the UK MMR court case since July 2002. Yet as far as the *Eye* can ascertain, she has never declared that potential "conflict" on any of her research papers.

Dr Elizabeth Miller, head of immunisation at the government's Health Protection Agency (HPA), last year alone published three papers in the *Archives of Disease in Childhood* directly related to the MMR controversy. One suggested that the combined triple live virus does not overload the immune system, so there is no need for single vaccines. Two others suggested that parents have been more likely to attribute their children's autism to MMR since 1998, when Dr Wakefield and his team at the Royal Free hospital in north London published their controversial paper.

Nowhere on Dr Miller's papers does she declare that she is also an expert witness for the drug companies GlaxoSmithKline, Aventis Pasteur and Merck.

Moreover, the *Eye* has begun trawling through scientific and medical journals to examine papers published over the last two years by other defendant drug company experts. So far we have not found a single declaration on any paper that the author also acts as an expert for the defendant drug companies – even though at least two of the experts (Dr Diane Griffin, an American, and Professor Volker ter Meulen, a German), have produced research papers directly associated with vaccination.

Unlike in the case of Dr Wakefield, there have been no screaming headlines attacking their credibility or honesty; no demands for an inquiry by the General Medical Council; no snipes at their "fatally flawed" research.

Instead, such authors continue to enjoy the support of government and big business. By contrast, Dr Wakefield only has the support of harassed parents who believe their children were damaged by MMR, and, until recently, the impoverished Legal Services Commission – hardly powerful or influential.

Dr Miller maintains that neither she nor her department was paid by the three pharmaceutical companies for the detailed and lengthy report she submitted on their behalf to the court last June. She prepared their evidence in her own time, her department says, and did not declare it on any papers because there was no financial interest.

Nevertheless, it is known that money from those companies finds its way into the agency, formerly the Public Health Laboratory Service, through other research channels. In a recent annual report, Dr Miller listed five "non-personal" interests – ie payments which benefited her department rather than herself. Two of the companies featured were MMR defendants.

The rules on conflict are weak, open to interpretation and generally not enforced – so should any criticism not be dished out in equal measure? As one leading journal states, "examples of potentially conflicting interests that should be disclosed include relationships that might detract from an author's objectivity in presentation of study results and interests whose value would be enhanced by the results presented".

How can Sir Liam Donaldson, chief medical officer, and his deputy responsible for immunisation, Dr David Salisbury, justify their attacks on Dr Wakefield for non-disclosure of an interest when their own staff appear equally compromised? No doubt Dr Miller sought clearance before agreeing to act for the defendant drug companies. But every time she now opens her mouth the question arises: Is she speaking from the "impartial" view of the health department, open to all new research that comes to its attention; or for that of the defendant drug companies? As *Eye* readers will recall, Dr Miller also conducted the first ever trial of MMR among 10,000 children before its introduction in the UK nationwide.

It is clear the medical establishment and ministers had been waiting for an opportunity to attempt to discredit Dr Wakefield. Thus they seized on the *Sunday Times*'s resurrection of a debate about conflict which emerged in the *Lancet* six years ago when Dr Wakefield published his controversial 1998 study.

Shortly after publication the *Lancet* carried a letter from Dr Wakefield on behalf of all the authors in response to suggestions that there may have been "litigation bias" in their paper. It said that Dr Wakefield had agreed quite separately to evaluate a small number of children on behalf of the Legal Aid Board. "These children have all been seen expressly on the basis that they were referred through the normal channels (eg GP, child psychiatrist or community paediatrician) on the merits of their symptoms."

Nothing about that "conflict" has changed. But *Lancet* editor Richard Horton seemed to panic in the face of more serious – and completely unsubstantiated – allegations from the *Sunday Times* about subjecting the children to invasive procedures without ethical approval and questions about the *Lancet*'s role in the affair – allegations the newspaper was forced to ditch.

Interestingly, Horton's condemnation of the Royal Free paper as "fatally flawed" (which gave oxygen to the *Sunday Times* "scoop") was dropped by the time the *Lancet* published its statement about the affair the following week. It stated that it was "regretful" that the *Lancet* had not been made aware that the parallel legal aid had not been disclosed as it should have been "because it would have been material to our decision-making about the paper's suitability, credibility and validity for publication". It did not withdraw the paper or say it was fatally damaged.

Of course the issue of potential conflicts of interest – whether by Dr Wakefield or those acting as experts for the defendant drug companies – only flags up the possibility of research flawed by bias. Before a study can be "fatally flawed", as health chiefs maintain Dr Wakefield's is, the research itself must be shown to be faulty.

Aside from the fact that even Horton accepts that the Royal Free team identified a new syndrome suffered by children with gut disease and autism (something so scientifically and medically significant, one might think it worthy of investment and further investigation), that original paper is now the equivalent of scientific chip wrappings. Science has moved on; and the Royal Free team has published more papers detailing the unique pattern of disease in these children's guts.

In both the UK and US, meanwhile, measles virus, some of it vaccine strain, has now been found at the site of inflammation in the guts, in the blood and in the spinal fluid of some autistic children but not in "normal" children. Separate studies at Utah State University have found that some autistic children have auto-antibodies which are attacking the protein sheath that protects the nerve and brain. In those children, researchers found a higher level of measles virus antibodies and an "unusual MMR" antibody, whereas their response to other vaccines did not differ between autistic and normal children.

None of this proves causation or a link; but combined they do provide a mechanism for brain damage and one potential trigger that might lead to autism. And that surely needs further investigation.

Last week, while some newspapers and the medical establishment queued up to kick Dr Wakefield, a new US study of children defined as autistic by the US department of education and the biological surveillance summaries of the Center for Disease Control found "a biological plausibility and epidemiological evidence showing a direct relationship between... measles containing vaccines and serious neurological disorders".

It also found a relationship between mercury containing vaccines and neurological disorders, the subject of litigation in the US. At the top of the study the authors, Dr Mark Geier and David Geier, both declare a potential conflict of interest in that they have been expert witnesses or consultants in areas involving adverse reactions to vaccines in civil litigation.

One rule for the off-message messenger Dr Andrew Wakefield (above) and another for the likes of Dr Elizabeth Miller

In May last year Dr Miller – in her role as head of immunisation at the HPA, rather than as an expert for the drug companies – was critical of the Geiers' earlier work. As indeed was Britain's Committee on Safety of Medicines, which found "serious methodological" flaws. But as the *Daily Mail* and other newspapers reported last week, that committee and the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation is packed with experts who either have shares in the defendant drug companies, receive funding for research from them or are paid advisers to them.

As the *Eye* reported in 2002, three of the members who sat on the Medical Research Council's review of the ten-fold rise in autism were advisers to the defendant drug companies. Even the chair had shares in one of the companies.

The point is that potential conflicts of interest are common in medical and scientific research and development and Dr Wakefield's is but a puff in the wind. Ninety percent of research depends on big business and the pharmaceutical companies – and this is set to rise. The big companies already have a direct line to the prime minister through the Pharmaceutical Industry Competitiveness Task Force (PICTF), which Tony Blair set up after a meeting with the heads of AstraZeneca, Glaxo Wellcome and SmithKlineBeecham.

The companies have already stated that they see the NHS as a huge unexploited resource. And the government's own reforming NHS Plan 2000 states that: "The pharmaceutical industry is a UK success story, employing over 60,000 skilled workers and maintaining an annual trade surplus of over £2bn. The industry is also the UK's leading investor in research and development. The NHS has a major role to play in ensuring that the UK remains an attractive base for the industry."

Hence it has set about removing barriers to big business in the drug industry, encouraging hospitals and universities to enter into joint ventures and create mini-companies to exploit their research. They will inevitably become even more dependant on drug company influence – and even more at risk of serious conflicts of interest. Yet no one is shouting about that.

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

LESS than six months ago the financial services authority (FSA) finally believed it had seen the last of Merton Securities, the corporate adviser which had popped up in just too many dubious deals, including one share ramp planned by Russian organised crime.

Merton's colourful history was detailed here a year ago (*Eye* 1075). In September, Merton finally lost its authorisation: not because of its clients or reputation but because of a lack of "adequate resources" – a technical answer to a long-running FSA desire. At the same time the "approved person" status of all those at Merton lapsed.

But now it seems that Brian Jelley, the former banker behind Merton, is discussing a possible comeback – not just with Merton Mark Two, but also with a listing on the lightly regulated AIM market for an international financial conglomerate with interests spread from London to South Korea via a Caribbean internet bank and a Minnesota hot rod track.

According to documentation sent to potential investors, Jelley is managing director of Sejong Capital, a recently formed company supposedly operating out of the London West End offices of yet another regulatory and *Eye* favourite, lawyer and discredited dealmaker Andrew Greystoke. Merton also once operated from the same address.

MUMMY'S HOME! SORRY I'M LATE... LOVELY PICTURE JULIAN... WELL DONE JOCASTA... NOW.. OFF TO BED... NANNY WILL TELL YOU A STORY
SCHOOL REPORT
RGJ

Speed Doting

However, despite using the telephone number of Greystoke's Atlantic Law, when called the response is that Sejong and Jelley cannot be contacted there although they are somewhere in the same building. Despite its global ambitions, three months after formation Sejong Capital has still not managed a telephone listing.

Sejong, formed in November last year, is being suggested as the UK parent for the long established Sejong Securities brokerage firm in South Korea. The idea is for Sejong Capital to acquire control of Sejong Financial Holding, which in turn controls Sejong Securities, for $42m. There is also talk of spending another $5m to acquire control of the online Griffon Bank in Dominica.

Up to $50m would be raised by way of a loan to be refinanced within a year by an offering of shares in Sejong Capital, first in a placing and then via an AIM listing.

As if that were not enough, the group would be further enhanced by the possible acquisition of no less than $400m in shares and property. The shares represent control of Sports Resorts International, a company listed on the NASDAQ minnows market which is developing a hot rod track in Michigan to match the one in Minnesota. The property is a large tract of land proposed for a hotel/casino development in the US Virgin Islands.

If all this went ahead, all but $3m of the $50m would go to pay off either South Korean banks or the vendors of SRI and Griffon Bank. The $205m balance of the cost of buying control of SRI together with the $198m to be paid for the Caribbean property would be financed in Sejong Capital shares.

Nothing if not ambitious for a man who previously rarely progressed beyond companies listed on the high risk over-the-counter "pink sheets" market.

SRI is currently capitalised at $227m although the company as yet has minimal revenues. The shares have risen since last month from just under $4 to $4.69. But a year ago they were $8.65. Just who is selling the 2,500 acres in St Croix is unclear as is the validity of the proposed $198m valuation.

The Griffon Bank has been in business for several years. It is one of the last banks left standing on Dominica which has been under pressure to clean up its act by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). Only last year the island was finally removed from the FATF black list because of its poor controls against money-laundering. Griffon offers full online services for credit cards and bank accounts in five minutes, an arrangement which is hardly likely to enthuse the FSA.

While Sejong Securities is well known in South Korea, it has not escaped censure from local regulators. In January the firm was warned by the Korea Stock Exchange for making illegal gains by accepting false orders to raise the prices of stocks.

Two years ago the financial supervisory commission (FSC) cancelled the business licence of Sejong Financial Holding and ordered it to dispose of its stakes in all its subsidiaries, including Sejong Securities. This action was taken because the company had failed to meet an FSC deadline to produce a viable plan for its future finances.

Contacted on his mobile, Jelley said: "There is nothing been done yet. No decision has been made by Sejong in Korea. It depends whether Sejong can obtain funding. I have met them and discussed extending their operations outside Korea. Sejong Capital will not be applying for regulated business." Jelley said Merton was unlikely to be sold to Sejong Capital and insisted it would have retained its authorisation if he had decided to inject further finance but was not prepared to do so. "The business was not there." Jelley's personal FSA authorisation is characterised as inactive.

All of this could be pipe dreams. But if these plans for Sejong Capital come to fruition, the FSA is likely to become nervous all over again.

THE trials and tribulations of Lord Conrad Black eerily begin to echo those of his old friend Garth Drabinsky, once the biggest theatre owner in North America but now a fugitive from US justice and awaiting trial in his native Canada, where he and Black still share the same lawyer.

Drabinsky built up Livent into a showbiz giant. He and Black were soon not just friends but business partners. In June 1998, as the Livent bubble began to over-inflate, Black's then publishing group Southam paid Can$18m (£7.2m) for a 5 percent stake.

Black and Drabinsky were already directors of each other's companies. They had a lot in common. "Garth very artfully surrounded himself with people who would say yes. He was known for forcing his staff to bow to the power of his personality. The concept of cost/benefit analysis just didn't enter the picture", the *Toronto Star* was told by a Livent insider.

Two months later Drabinsky and his deputy were suspended for "accounting irregularities". They were later fired.

In 1999 Livent collapsed and Drabinsky was indicted on 16 counts of securities fraud by the US authorities. He was also the target of civil charges of fraudulent accounting by the Securities & Exchange Commission. US prosecutors accused Drabinsky of a "massive" and "brazen" scheme to conceal multi-million losses.

Drabinsky refused to go to the US to face either trial. Instead he stayed in Canada and waited to see what the authorities there would do given that Livent was a Canadian company.

Black was unimpressed by the seriousness of the charges against his friend. So much so that he continued to hire him as an adviser on marketing and promotion for the National Post newspaper he then part-owned.

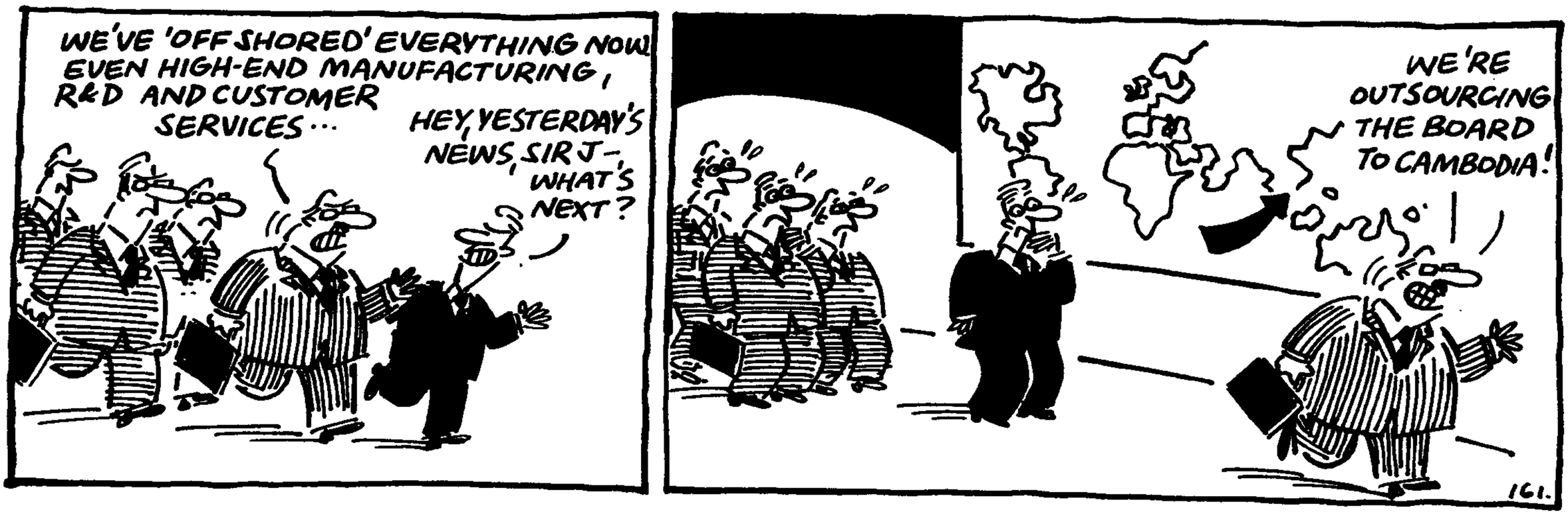
In October 2002 the Canadians finally charged Drabinsky and three former Livent executives with defrauding investors and creditors of Can$460m (£185m) by falsifying financial statements between 1989 and 1998. Drabinsky is still awaiting trial. The Americans are letting Canada have the first pop but may still seek Drabinsky's extradition once he has been tried in Toronto.

A sequence events that may now face Lord Black as with the Barclays brothers escape route blocked by the Delaware courts he now looks forward to a build up in civil claims over the Hollinger companies in the US and Canada from his former colleagues and shareholders – which could soon be joined by first the SEC and possibly even criminal charges in New York or Chicago. Those might trigger similar proceedings in Canada by both regulators and the police. There seems ample evidence already of "accounting irregularities", although not to cover losses merely Black's personal pillaging.

Perhaps like his old pal Garth, Lord Black

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG

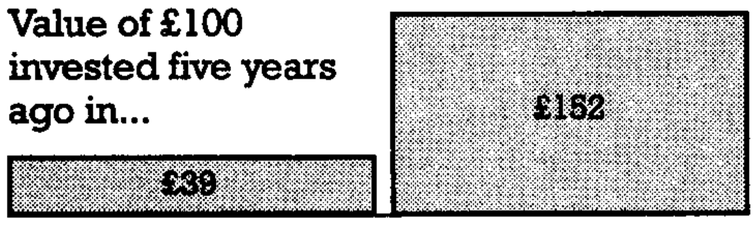

WE'VE 'OFF SHORED' EVERYTHING NOW EVEN HIGH-END MANUFACTURING, R&D AND CUSTOMER SERVICES...
HEY, YESTERDAY'S NEWS, SIR J – WHAT'S NEXT?
WE'RE OUTSOURCING THE BOARD TO CAMBODIA!
161.

Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

Crumbling Abbey

Value of £100 invested five years ago in...



should turn to religion. Drabinsky has produced a film version of the Gospel of St John while awaiting his own judgement.

ONLY in the British legal system would it be considered possible to take two years and more than £100m to resolve whether the Bank of England deliberately refused to regulate the Bank of Cocaine and Conmen International thereby assisting in its 1991 $10bn collapse.

The basic lie at the heart of the Bank's position and inaction was that BCCI was a Luxembourg bank so had to be regulated there.

Yet anyone who ever visited BCCI in Luxembourg would have discovered an extremely small and unimpressive, almost anonymous, operation tucked away above some shops. Luxembourg is a city of banks yet BCCI was an easy one to miss. Unlike others of similar size which had branches there that were not their supposed head office. This was clearly not the world headquarters of a global bank.

By comparison in London BCCI had large and impressive offices in the City just a short walk from the Bank of England. That clearly was the world headquarters. It was where the founder Aga Hasan Abedi and his acolytes ran BCCI. They were rarely to be found in Luxembourg.

No wonder Bank officials described the Luxembourg concept as "something of a fiction". A fiction that the Bank relied upon to avoid having to act whenever it received information that should have caused it to close BCCI.

That fiction and the refusal to act which it was based on could end up costing the taxpayer more than £500m plus those £100m in legal costs if the BCCI creditors win the case.

THE Serious Farce Office is understood to be continuing with declining enthusiasm to study the documents produced by the *Guardian* alleging corruption by BAE Systems in Saudi arms deals.

While no final decision has yet been taken insiders suspect that no further action will be taken. Corruption is always a hard case to prove unless one or other party confesses or there is irrefutable evidence. Neither appears to be the case with BAE, even though it is clear that the company was hardly acting in a way that inspires confidence in its propriety. Even if what it was doing was little more than business as usual when it comes to selling arms to Arabs.

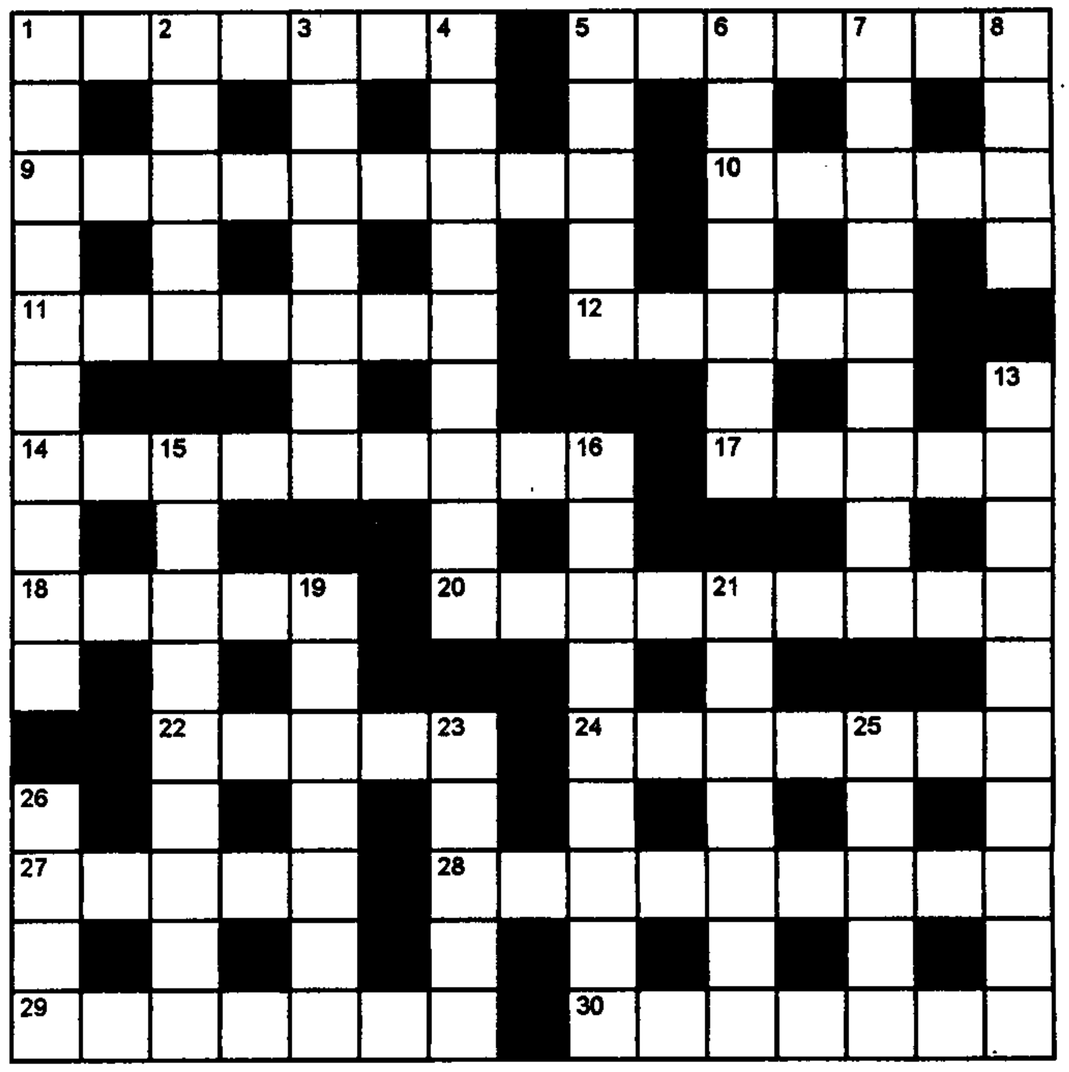
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 256

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 12 March 2004.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1 Ted to Maggie? A right cold weed with hint of femininity inside (4-3)
5 An element of extra advantage getting tossed by Ben (7)
9 Groups practising troilism, perhaps, with sailor (rating) (5-4)
10 Used by judge to get quiet girl to hold very head of erection (5)
11/12/26 Was a useless wanker but didn't care (7,4,1,4)
14 One unable to get off with Simon turning to get back in with Bill (9)
17 Flesh and blood male dominated by Brenda (5)
18 Vanessa's tip: "Zion activity here in Italy" (5)
20 Norah, ego ruffled, absorbs climax of thunder clap (9)
22 Wife has leg up for young upstart (5)
24 Increase what you have and get stuffed (2,5)
27 Looks like a lecher's sole perversion, grabbing Morag's bottom (5)
28 Sexually active type in his element with journalist wearing body jewellery (9)
29 Makes an accommodating arrangement of *Duff Street Blues* (7)
30 One who fancies O'Connor and Paddy King (7)

DOWN

1 Let-down Northern relative cried out with orgasm (10)
2 Phwoar! Females undo tops in this holiday spot (5)
3 Area of influence demanding Falconer's head if Dome disastrous (7)
4 Neil 'Tit' Kinnock's heart broken by Glenys's first calling (9)
5 'Gold-hearted' doctors need rise, kid (5)
6 Roger to get this, for example, in Beau's embrace (3-4)
7 Try to shag at a party (4,1,4)
8 Regulation markedly stiff length? (4)
13 Diplomat, one who needs to get a life, loses day in endless Mars Bar abuse (10)
15 Potentially lethal plant – needs stiffener and healthy nip of brandy (8,1)
16 Head done in by company name: "Pain in the Arse" (9)
19 Keep an eye on the sportsman's balls and churchman's seat (7)
21 Alien stunners tore top of shorts holding guy off (3,4)
23 Bush and local El Salvador leaders (5)
25 Kissinger's other set of tits? (5)
26 See 11 Across

Crossword 255 winner: AMANDA TANFIELD

ACROSS: 1/11 Tired and emotional 5 Used-up 10 Rip up 12 Buggery 13 Drummer 14 Massacre 16 Semen 19 Often 21 Vitamin C 23 Bladder 25 Maclean 27/30 A piss-up in a brewery 28 Elvis 29 Samosa.

DOWN: 1 Throb 2 Repugnant 3 Depress 4 Needy 6 Slip-ups 7 Denim 8 Pull rank 9 Cold feet 15 Cover-ups 17 Manoeuvre 18 Top brass 20 Nudists 22 Machete 24 Axiom 25 McNab 26 Nasty.

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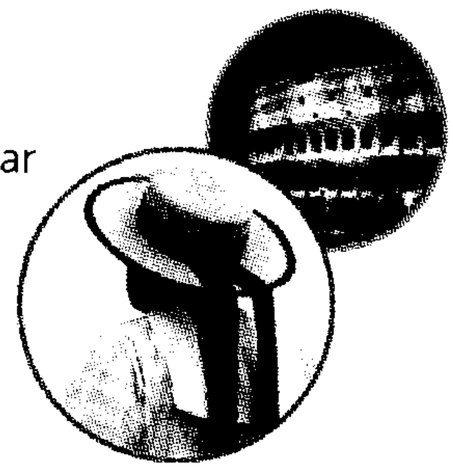

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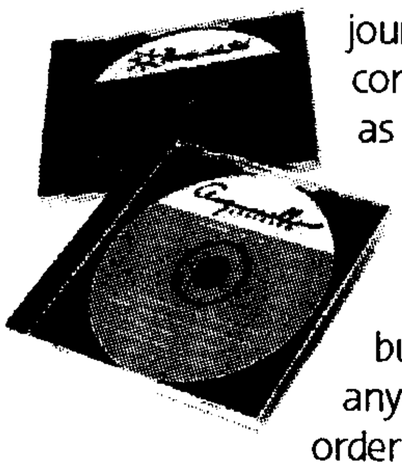

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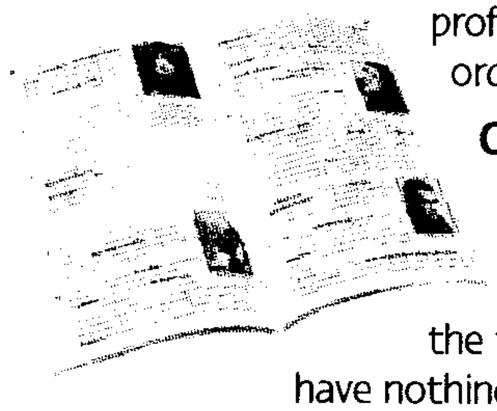

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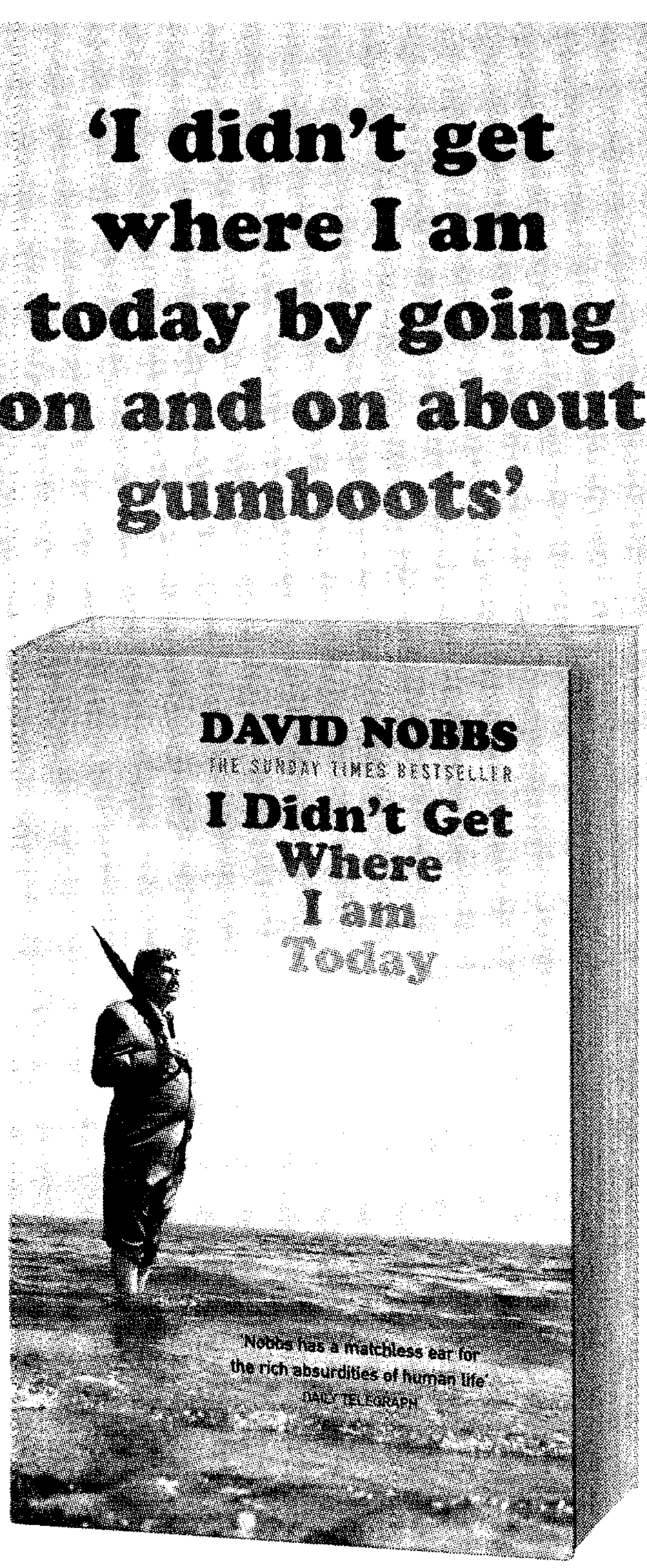
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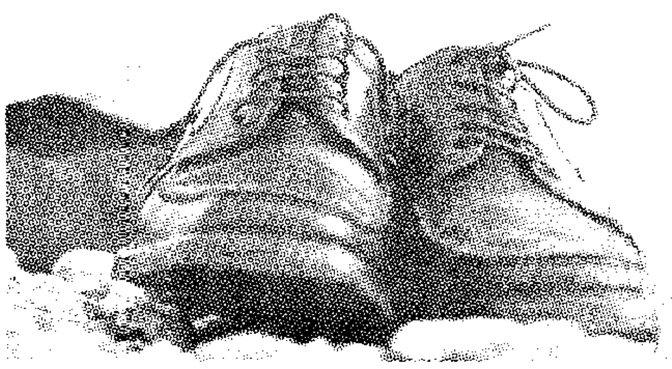

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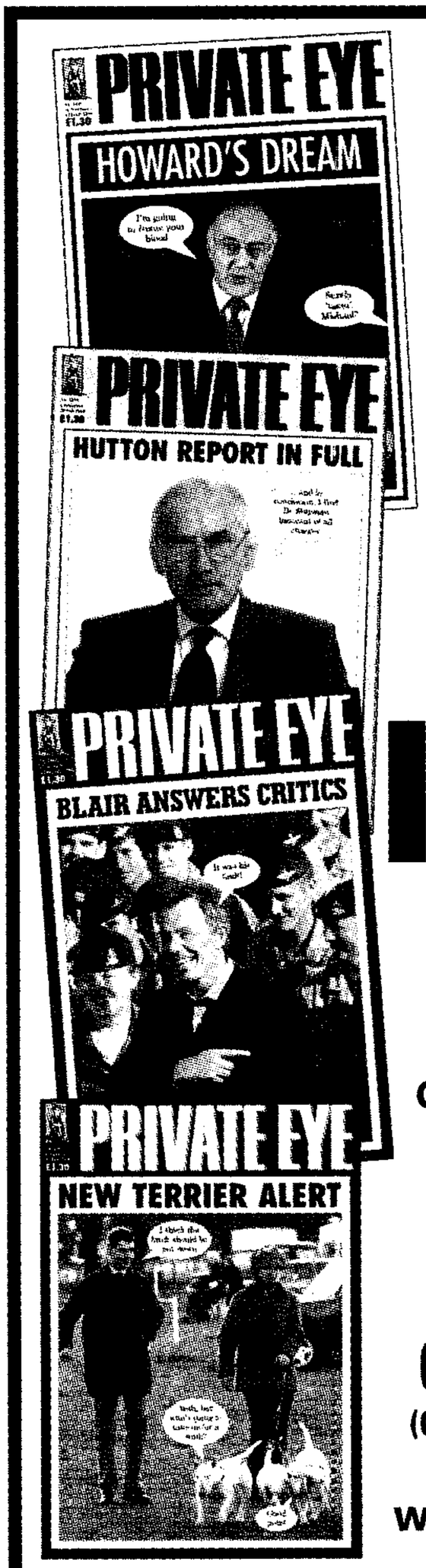

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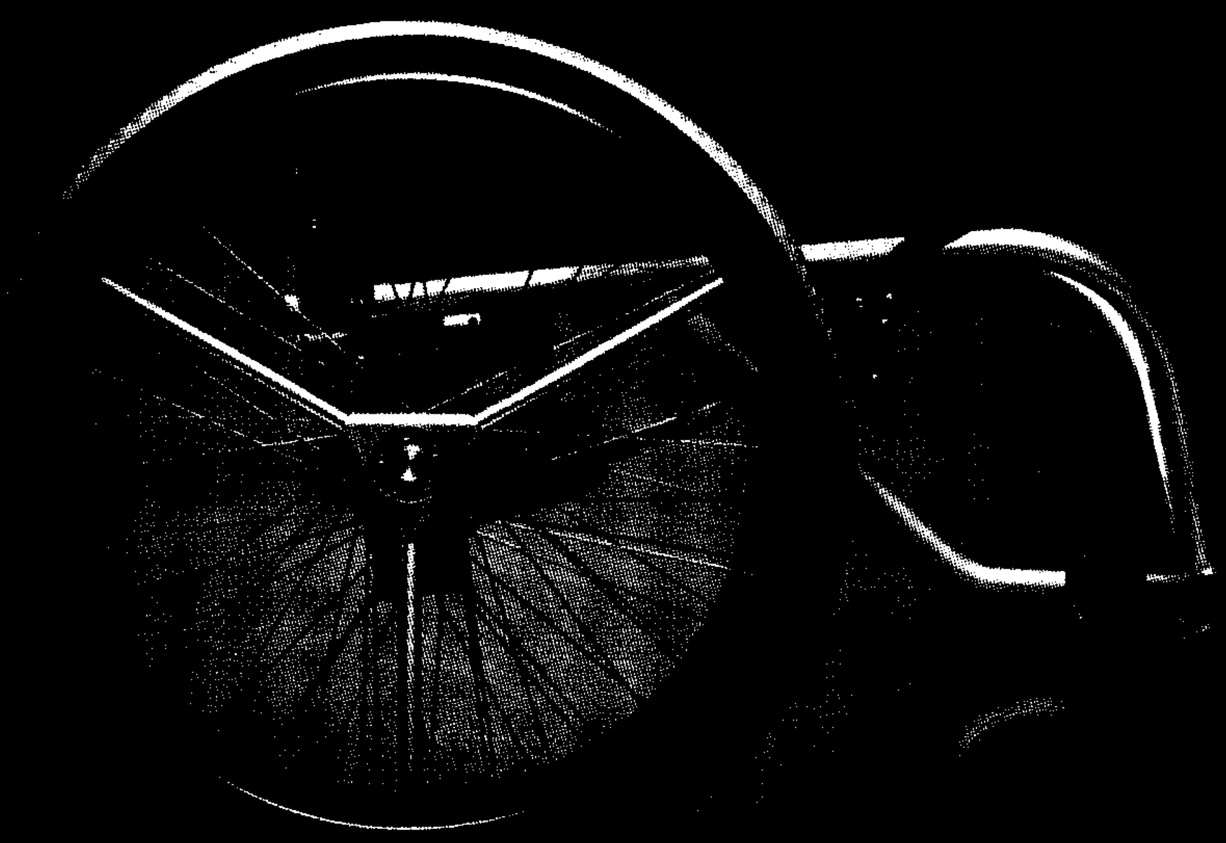

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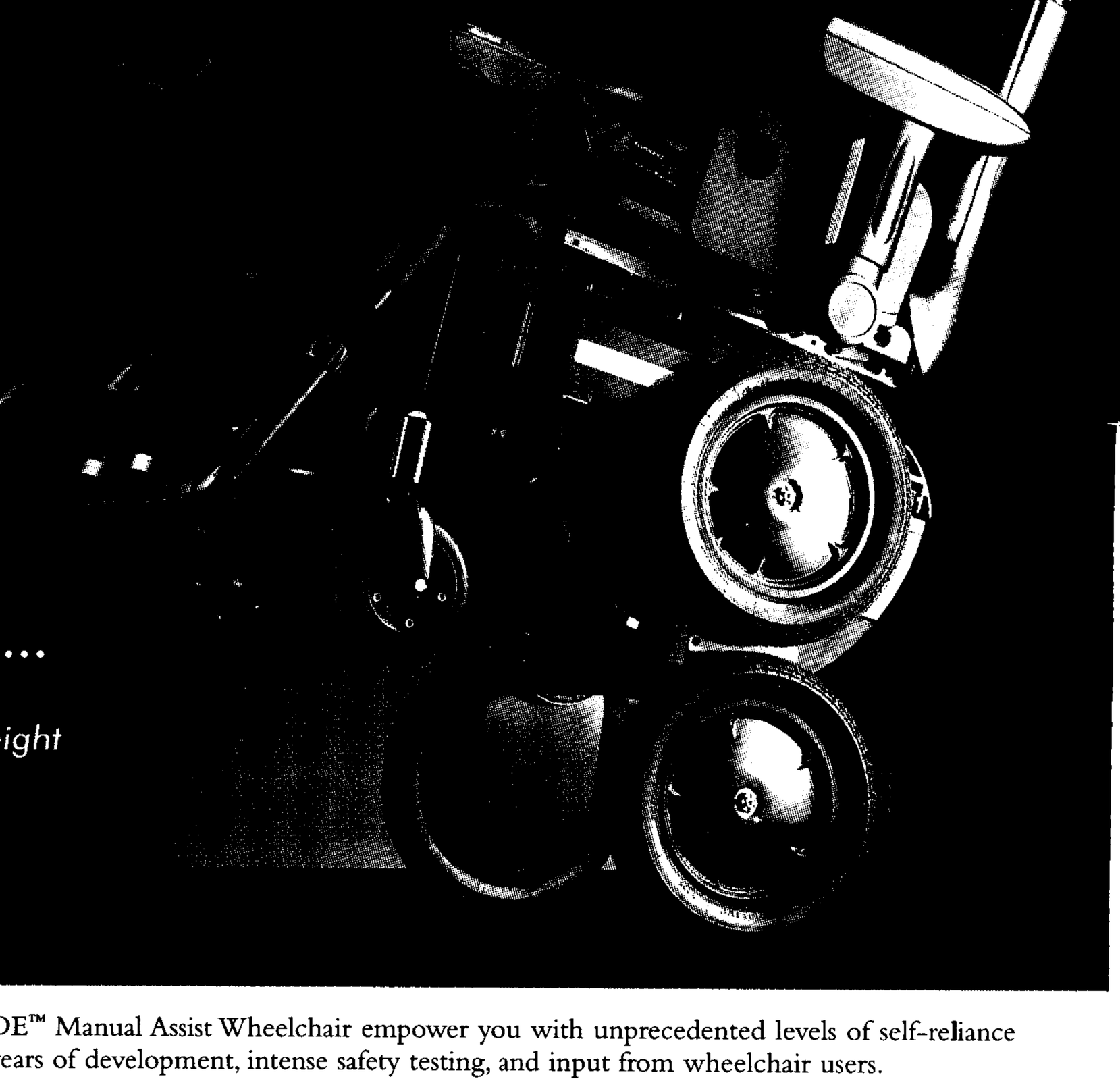

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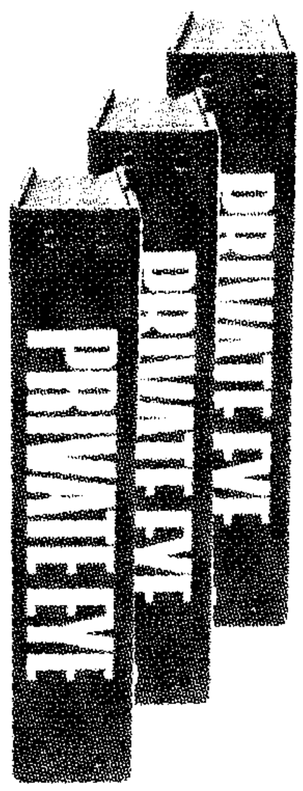

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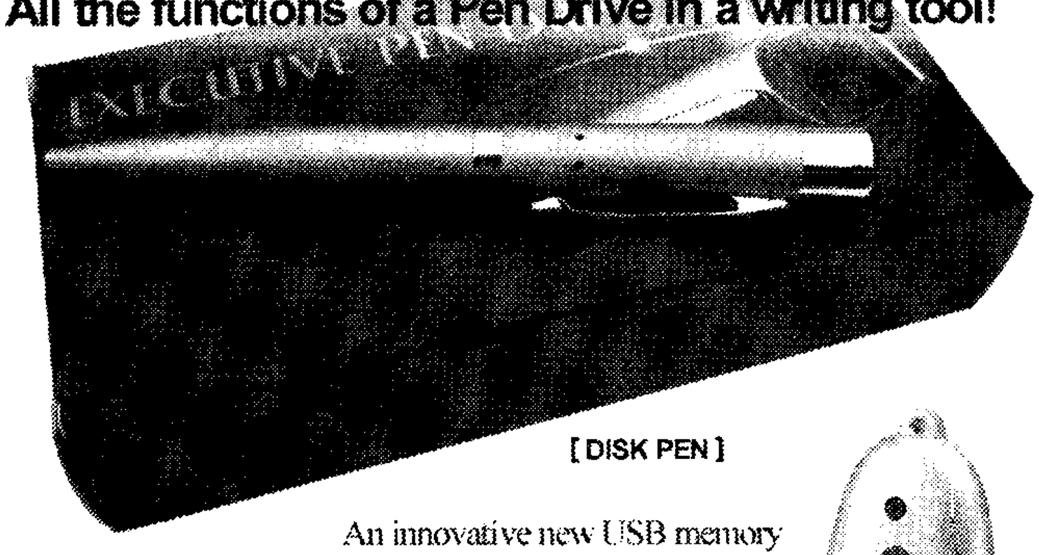

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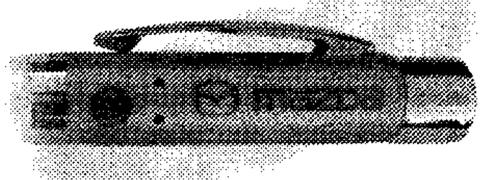

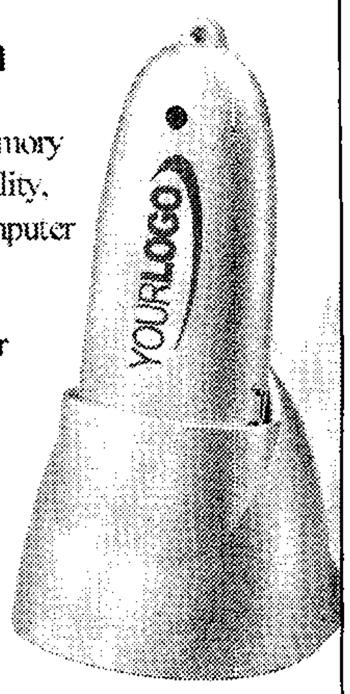

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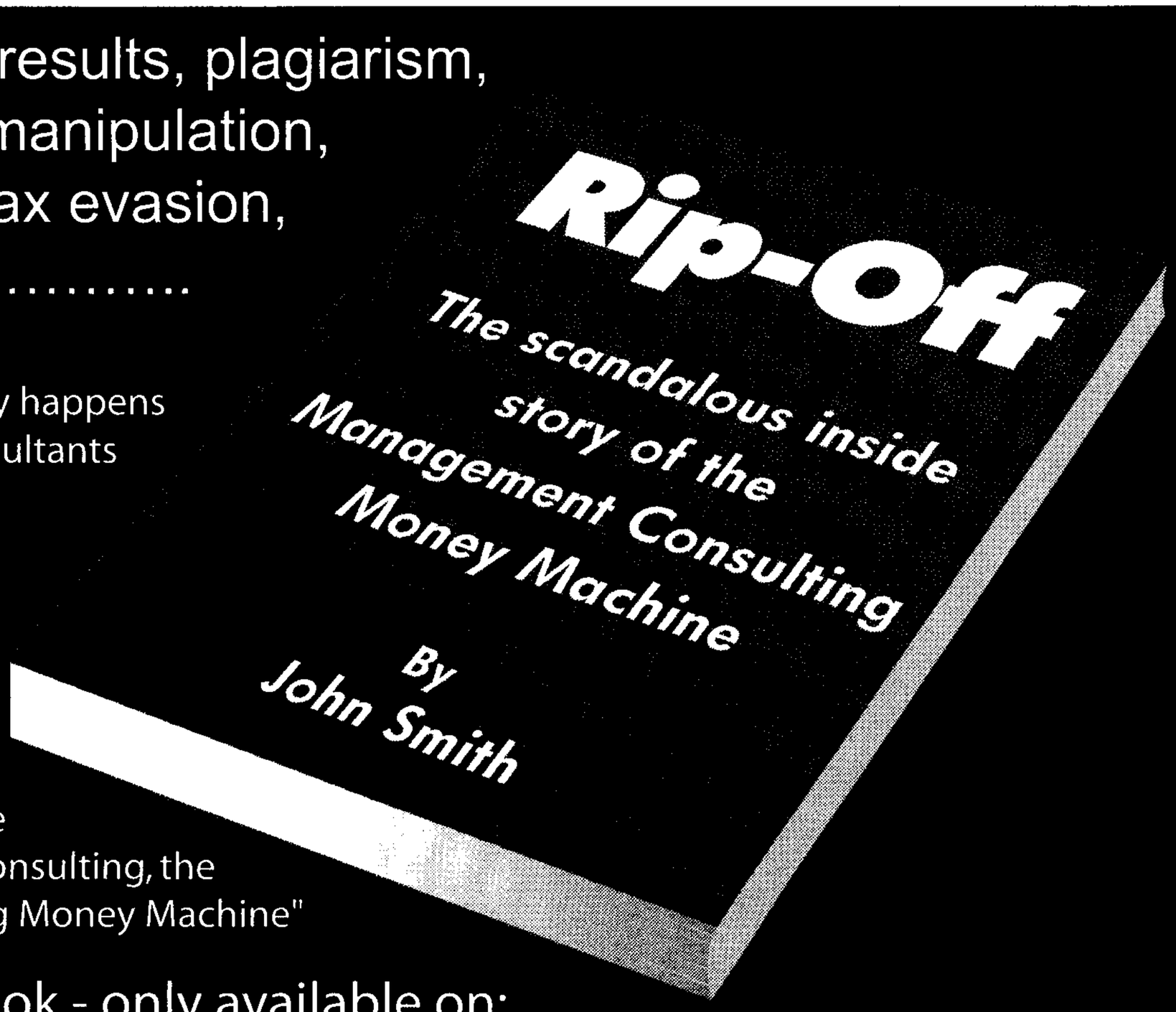

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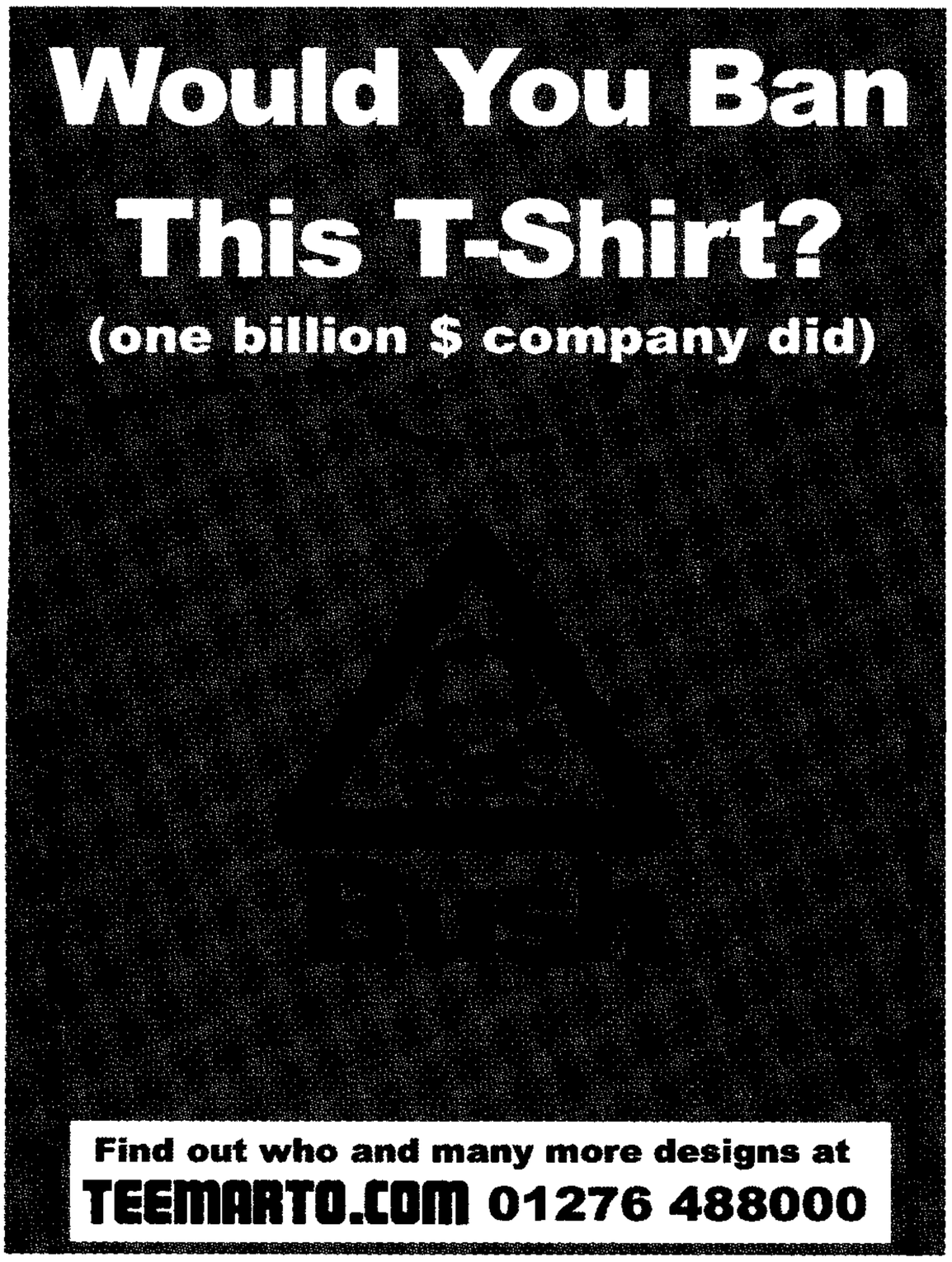

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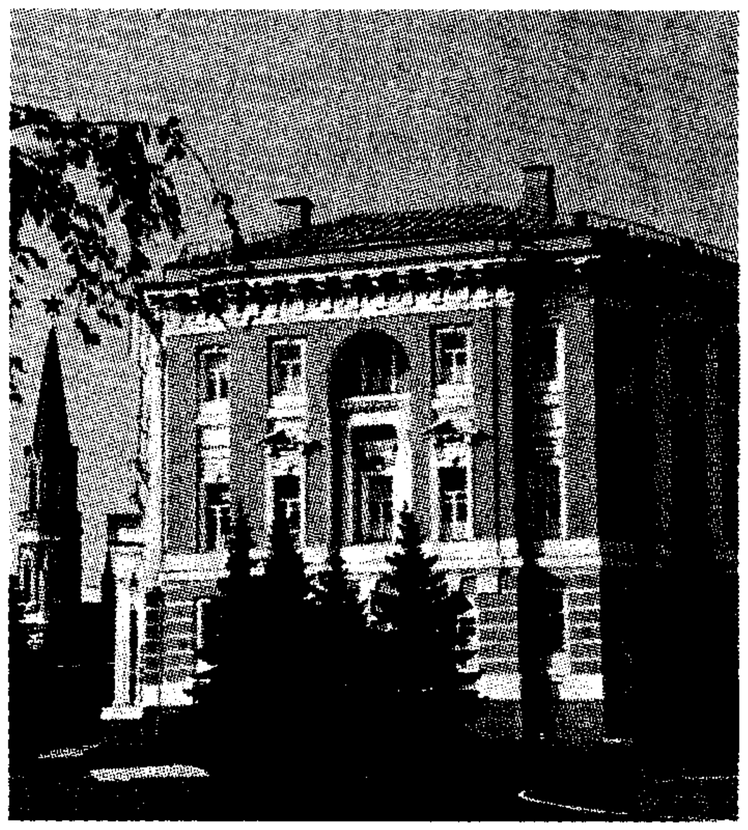

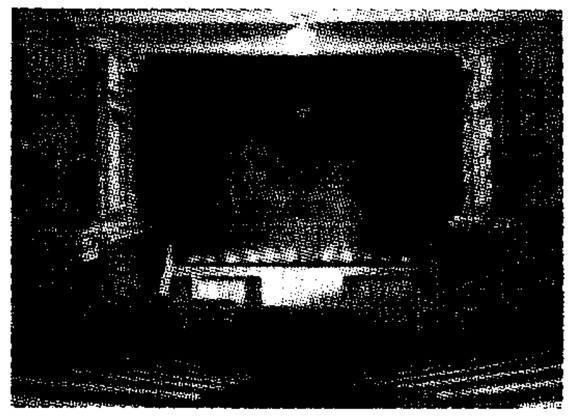

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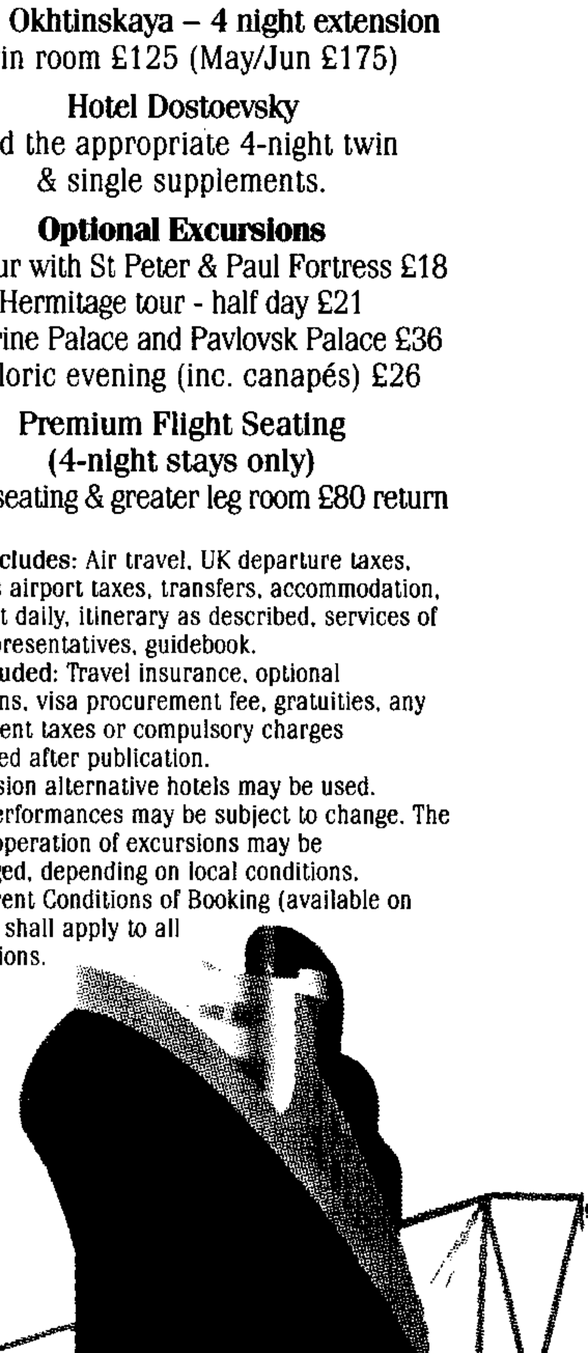

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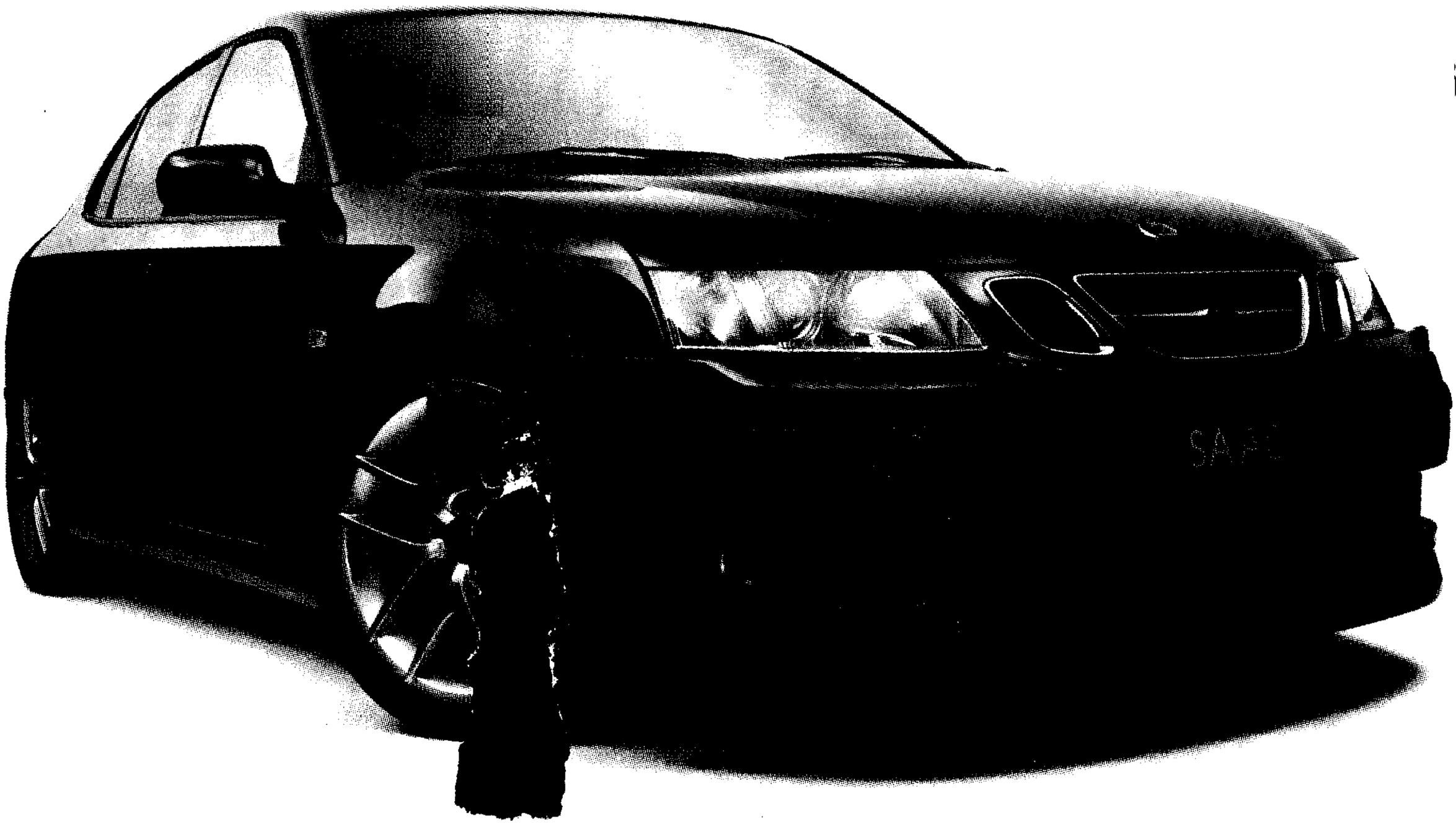

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